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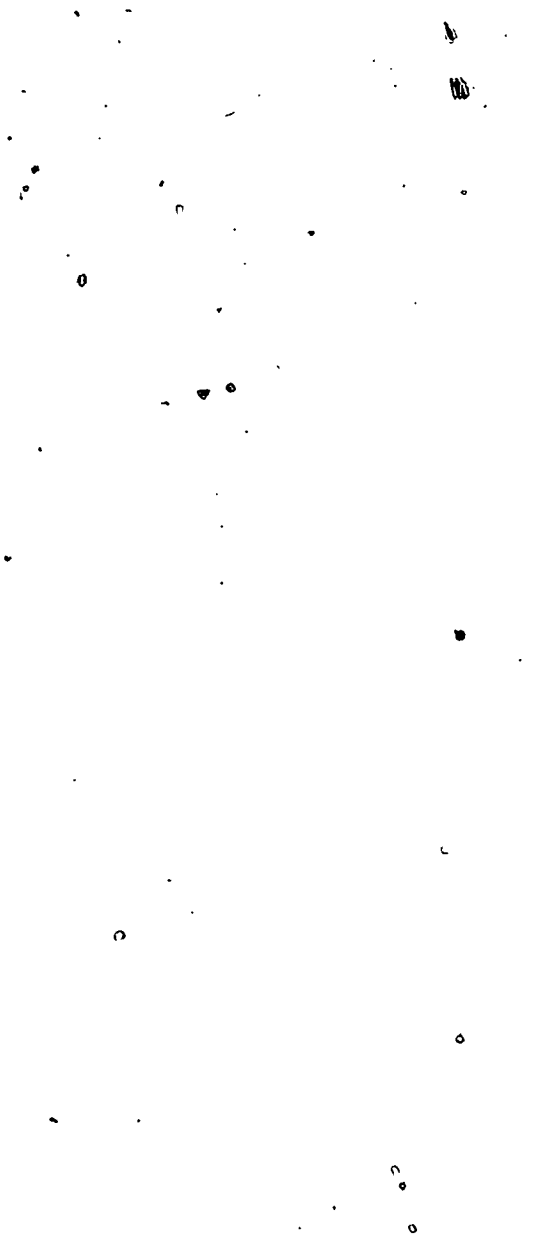

# HORÆ HOMILETICÆ,

OR

# DISCOURSES

(IN THE FORM OF SKELETONS)

UPON

# The Whole Scriptures.

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BY

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## XCIX.

### THE JEALOUSY OFFERING.

Numb. v. 29. *This is the law of jealousies.*

MANY ordeals have been devised by man; but they are all superstitious, delusive, cruel, and unjust. But there has been one established by God himself, which was open to no objection. It was appointed for the satisfaction of any who might conceive themselves injured by their wives. The jealous husband might bring his wife to a tribunal, at which the heart-searching God was to be both witness and judge. The process was this—He was to bring his wife to the priest; and with her an offering, not of fine wheat flour, but of barley meal; and that without either oil or frankincense; (the offering being intended to mark her humiliating and afflicted state.) He was then to take some holy water out of the laver, and to mix with it some dust from the floor of the tabernacle: and to repeat to the woman a form of imprecation; to which the woman was to say, 'Amen, Amen,' in token of her full consent to every part of it. This curse was then to be written in a book, and washed off again into the vessel that held the water; that so the water might be, as it were, impregnated with the curse. Then the offering was to be waved before the Lord, and part of it to be burnt upon the altar, in token that an appeal was made to God. Then the water was given to the woman to drink; and immediately it was seen whether she had been justly

or unjustly accused. If she had been guilty of unfaithfulness to her marriage vows, the curse she had imprecated upon herself came upon her: instantly her belly began to swell, and her thigh to rot; and her shame became visible to all. If, on the contrary, she was innocent, the water she had drunk produced no such effect, but rather a blessing from God came upon her.

"Such was the law of jealousies," as set forth in the chapter before us. But it is not on the *provisions* of this law, nor on *its sanctions*, that we intend to dwell: it is sufficient for us to know that such and such things were done, and that such and such effects were produced. It is to the *uses* of this law that we would direct your attention: and they will be found replete with interest and instruction.

Its use was two-fold; political, and moral:

I. Political—

Many of the Jewish laws were adapted exclusively to that people, and were wholly inapplicable to any other nation. The Jews lived under a Theocracy: God himself was their temporal, no less than their spiritual, Governor. Doubtful causes were referred to his decision; and there were means appointed for the manifestation of his will respecting them. Of this nature was the trial of a suspected wife; it was conducted by a direct appeal to God. This singular institution was of great national utility;

1. As a guardian of domestic peace—

[It must almost of necessity happen, that some husband, either through the perverseness of his own temper or the indiscretion of his wife, should feel "a spirit of jealousy" arising within him. Wherever such a thought is indulged, it corrodes, and eats out all domestic happiness; and, especially amongst a people so hard-hearted as the Jews, who were ever ready to put away their wives on the slightest occasions, it would lead to almost an immediate dissolution of the nuptial bonds. The miseries consequent on such hasty divorces may be more easily conceived than described — — — But when a man had the means of redress in his own hands, he would be less willing to indulge suspicion; or, if it arose, he would not suffer it to rankle in his bosom: he would either

either dismiss it from his mind, or bring it to an issue at once; that if it were justly founded, he might be released from his connexion; or, if unfounded, be delivered from his painful apprehensions.

Thus the law in question would retard the rise of jealousy, diminish its force, and facilitate its extinction; at the same time that it would prevent unjust divorces, and reconcile the mind to any which the circumstances of the case might require.]

2. As a preservative of public virtue—

[It is the hope of concealment that gives an edge to temptation. A thief will not steal, if he know that he must infallibly be detected: nor will the adulterer lay his plans of seduction, if he know that he cannot possibly conceal his guilt. Now, the remedy being in the hands of the injured party, and the issue of a trial certain, men would be cautious how they subjected themselves to such tremendous consequences as they had reason to expect. Females too would be upon their guard, not merely against the actual commission of sin, but against the smallest approximation towards it. The impossibility of escape would be a fence to their virtue, a barrier which no temptation could force. From their earliest days they would feel the necessity of being reserved in their habits, and circumspect in their conduct; and of abstaining, not only from evil, but from even the appearance of evil. For though they should not be found criminal to the extent that the jealousy of their husbands had led them to imagine, few would wholly exculpate them, or think that they had not given some grounds for suspicion: and the consciousness of this would make the trial itself extremely formidable even to those who had nothing to fear on account of the ultimate decision.

Hence then it is manifest, that the existence of this law would give a salutary check to the passions of mankind, and operate in the most favourable manner on all classes of the community.]

Its use, as political, was important; but it was still more so as,

II. Moral—

Minute and trifling as many of the Jewish laws may appear, there was not one but was intended to inculcate some great lesson of morality. This which we are considering was of very extensive benefit. It had a direct tendency,

1. To convince the sceptical—

[The general notion of mankind is, that God does not attend to their actions: "Tush, the Lord doth not see, neither doth the Almighty regard it," is the language of every heart[a]——But a single

[a] Isai. xxix. 15. Ps. lxxiii. 11. Job xxii. 13, 14.

a single execution of this law would carry an irresistible conviction to every mind. It is supposed that the crime committed has been so secret, that no human being, except the guilty persons, were acquainted with it. It is supposed also that no clew for the discovery of it could possibly be found. Behold the issue of this ordeal, and the offending woman justifying that God who had inflicted vengeance on her: could any doubt now remain, whether God see our actions or not; or whether he will suffer sin to pass unpunished? The most determined Atheist (if such a Being could be found) must, like the worshippers of Baal, be convinced at such a sight, and exclaim, "The Lord, he is God; the Lord, he is God!" "verily there is a God that judgeth in the earth[b]!"]

2. To reclaim the vicious—

[What must be the feelings of a man, who, after having rioted in iniquity, beholds such a scene as this? Must it not bring his own iniquities to his remembrance? Must he not tremble at the thought of appearing before this holy Lord God, and at the prospect of those judgments that shall be inflicted on him? Must he not realize in a measure that shame which he will be exposed to in the presence of the assembled universe, and that misery which will be co-eval with his existence? Yes; methinks he already begins to smite upon his breast, and cry for mercy; and determines from henceforth to walk in newness of life———]

3. To comfort the oppressed—

[Where a woman of blameless character was made the victim of her husband's jealousy, with what holy confidence would she drink the appointed cup, and make her appeal to the heart-searching God!——— and in what triumph would she depart from the tabernacle, when God himself had borne a public testimony to her innocence! From hence then might every one, whose name the breath of calumny had blasted, assure himself that a time was coming, when God would vindicate his injured character, and cause his righteousness to shine as the noon-day. David, under the accusations of Saul, consoled himself with this prospect[c]; and lived to attest the fidelity of God to those who trust in him[d]; and to recommend from his own experience this remedy to others[e]———True, the interposition of God may not, towards others, be so immediate, or so visible, in this world: but, in the world to come, if not before, shall that promise be fulfilled to every servant of the Lord, "Every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn[f]."]

We

[b] Ps. lviii. 11. Such passages as Ps. cxxxix. 11, 12. and Job xxxiv. 21, 22. would now appear to him in their true light.
[c] Ps. vii. 3—8. [d] Ps. xviii. 16—20. [e] Ps. xxxvii. 4—6.
[f] Isai. liv. 17. & lxvi. 5.

We cannot conclude the subject without recommending it to all,

1. To beware of appealing lightly to God—

[It is grievous to hear how carelessly men sware by God, or use the term, 'God knoweth.' But, however light men make of such appeals, God heareth them; and he will, sooner or later, manifest his indignation against all who so profane his holy name. Instantaneous displays of his vengeance are sometimes even now given, in order to check such impiety: but, if he bear with such persons for a season, in due time "their sin shall surely find them out"—]

2. To stand ready for the final judgment—

[This law has ceased: but there is another tribunal, to which all, whether male or female, married or unmarried, shall be summoned. Thither shall we be brought by our heavenly "Husband," "who is a jealous God, yea, whose very name is Jealous[g]:" and by his infallible decision will our eternal state be fixed. Think what must have been the frame of a woman's mind on the eve of her trial, when she knew herself to be guilty: must she not be filled with fear and trembling? How then can any of us be gay and thoughtless in the prospect of such an ordeal as WE have to pass! We cannot but acknowledge that we are justly branded as "adulterers and adulteresses[h]:" let us therefore confess our sins with all humility of mind, and wash in that "fountain which was opened for sin and for uncleanness.]

[g] Exod. xxxiv. 14. [h] Jam. iv. 4.

---

## C.

### THE LAW OF NAZARITES.

Numb. vi. 21. *This is the law of the Nazarite who hath vowed, and of his offering unto the Lord for his separation.*

THE Nazarites, in the best times of the Jewish state, were eminently pious. God himself declares concerning them, that "they were purer than snow, and whiter than milk[a]." The very order itself was instituted by divine appointment, on purpose that they might be blessings to the nation, and preserve the tone of piety and morals from decay. It was a favour to that people that "God raised up of their sons

[a] Lam. iv. 7.

sons for prophets;" nor was it less so, that he raised up of their "young men for Nazarites[b]." Some, as Sampson and John the Baptist, were separated by God himself even from their mother's womb; and the express order given, that from their very birth they should drink no wine, and that no razor should come upon their head[c]. Others perhaps, like Samuel, might be consecrated by their parents from the womb[d]. But, in general, the separation of themselves to be Nazarites was altogether voluntary and for a fixed time. The custom continued even to the Apostolic age. St. Paul himself seems to have completed the vow of Nazariteship at Cenchrea[e]: and when there were four men performing it at Jerusalem, he, in order to remove prejudice from the minds of those who thought him adverse to the law of Moses, united himself with them, bearing part of the charges attendant on that vow, and conforming himself in every thing to the prescribed ritual[f]. The law respecting them is contained in the chapter now before us: and, agreeably to the arrangement made for us in our text, we shall consider it as containing,

I. Their vows—

The *particulars* of their vow are here minutely detailed:

[They separated themselves for a season to an extraordinary course of attendance upon God. During that season they were not to touch any wine, or grapes either moist or dried. They were not to cut their hair, or to approach any dead body, or to mourn even for a father or a mother[g]. If, by any unforeseen accident, a person should fall down dead near him, or a corpse be brought nearly into contact with him, he was to shave his head, and offer both a burnt-offering and a sin-offering (to atone for the pollution he had contracted), and was to begin again the term of his separation, the whole that had passed having been rendered null and void[h].]

The *design* of it, though not expressly declared in Scripture, yet may without difficulty be ascertained—

[It

[b] Am. ii. 11.
[c] Judg. xiii. 4, 5, 7, 14. Luke i. 15.
[d] 1 Sam. i. 11.
[e] Acts xviii. 18.
[f] Acts xxi. 23, 24.
[g] ver. 2—8.
[h] ver. 9—12.

[It seems that the order of Nazarites was intended to prefigure Christ, who, though not observant of the laws relating to that order, was from eternity consecrated to the service of his God, not only by the designation of his Father, but by his own voluntary engagement, and completed the course of his obedience till he could say, "It is finished."

But we have no doubt respecting the design of God to exhibit to us in the Nazarites a pattern for our imitation. The appointment itself has ceased with the law: "the believing Gentiles" are expressly told that they "are not required to observe any such thing[i]." But, though the form has ceased, the substance remains. We are called to consecrate ourselves unreservedly to God. This is our duty, and our privilege. "We are not our own; we are bought with a price;" and therefore bought, "that we may glorify God with our bodies and our spirits, which are his." Every one amongst us should subscribe with his hand, and say, I am the Lord's[k]"———We need not literally abstain from wine; but we should shew a holy superiority to all *the pleasures* of sense. We may enjoy them, because "God has given us all things richly to enjoy:" but we should not seek our happiness in them, or be at all enslaved by them; or value them any further, than we can enjoy God in them, and glorify him by them. The same indifference should we manifest also in relation to *the cares* of this life. We may mourn indeed, but never indulge that "sorrow of the world, which worketh death." Having God for our portion, the loss of all earthly things should be comparatively but little felt———We are not called to that singularity of dress which marked the Nazarites to public view: but surely we are called not to be conformed to every idle fashion, or to be running into all the absurdities which characterize the votaries of this world. A Christian should despise such vanities, and "be no more of this world, than Christ himself was of the world"———From pollution of every kind we should stand at the remotest distance: we should "have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness," but "be purged from dead works to serve the living God." What caution, what holy fear should we maintain! What dread of dishonouring our Lord, and walking unworthy of our holy profession! Surely we should "abstain even from the appearance of evil," and labour to "be pure as God himself is pure"——— If at any time, through weakness or inadvertence, we contract pollution, we must not think to proceed as if we had done nothing amiss: no; sin, of whatever kind, must be repented of: for, if it be continued in, it will infallibly destroy us[l]. We must, like the Nazarite, instantly apply ourselves to the atoning sacrifice of Christ, and seek remission through his precious blood. Yea, like him too, we must renew our dedication of ourselves to God, just

[i] Acts xxi. 25.
[k] Isai. xliv. 5. Rom. xiv. 7, 8.
[l] Ezek. xviii. 24.

just as if we never had been devoted to him before. This is the safest way, and by far the happiest. If we stand doubting and questioning about our former state, it may be long before we come to any comfortable conclusion: but if we leave the consideration of past experiences, or use them only as grounds of deeper humiliation, and devote ourselves to God again as we did at the beginning, we shall most honour the mercy of our God, and most speedily attain renewed tokens of his favour — — —]

At the completion of their vows they were required to present,

II. Their offerings—

These are particularly specified: they consisted of a he-lamb for a burnt-offering, to acknowledge God's goodness to them; an ewe-lamb for a sin-offering, to obtain mercy at his hands; and a ram for a peace-offering, to shew that they were in a state of favour and acceptance with God. Besides these, they were to offer a basket of unleavened bread, consisting of cakes mingled with oil, and wafers anointed with oil, with a meat-offering and a drink-offering. Of these a greater portion was given to the priest than on other occasions: for, not only the wave-breast and the heave-shoulder were his, but also the other shoulder of the ram, which was sodden or boiled, was added, with one unleavened cake and one unleavened wafer; and, after having been put into the hands of the Nazarite and waved before the Lord, were given to the priest as his portion. The Nazarites' hair also was shaven, and was burnt in the fire which boiled the peace-offerings. Thus was the termination of their vow publickly made known; and they, released from those particular obligations, were at liberty to resume the enjoyments which during their separation they had voluntarily renounced[m].

It would not be easy to mark with precision the exact design of these multiplied observances: but from a collective view of them we may gather,

1. That of all that we do, we should give the glory to God—

[This

[m] ver. 13—20.

[This was designed by the burnt-offering, as also by the heave-offering: they were acknowledgments to God, that his goodness to them was great, and that the service which they were enabled to render him had been the fruit of his love, and the gift of his grace. Thus should all our services be viewed. If they be regarded by us as grounds of self-preference and self-complacency, they will be odious to God in proportion as they are admired by us. We should never for a moment forget, that "it is by the grace of God we are what we are." "It is God who gives us both to will and to do, and that too altogether of his good pleasure." "Our sufficiency even for a good thought is derived from Him alone." Instead of imagining therefore that we lay God under obligations to us for any works that we do, we must remember that *the more we do for God, the more we are indebted to God* ———]

2. That, after all that we can do, we need an interest in the atoning blood of Christ—

[This was clearly manifested by the sin-offering. The Nazarite's hair was not burnt on the altar of the burnt-offerings, *to make atonement*, but with the fire that boiled the peace-offerings, *to make acknowledgment*. However holy our lives be, even though we were sanctified to God from the very womb, and never contracted such a degree of pollution as should destroy our hope of acceptance with him, yet must we be washed in "the fountain open for sin," even the fountain of Christ's blood, which alone "cleanseth from all sin." There is iniquity cleaving to our holiest things; and an atonement is as necessary for them as for our grossest sins: and that atonement can be found only in the sacrifice of Christ ———]

3. That when our term of separation is fulfilled, our joys shall be unrestrained for evermore—

["After that, the Nazarite may drink wine[n]:" and, after the short period of mortification and self-denial assigned us here, we shall "enter into the joy of our Lord," even into "his presence, where there is fulness of joy, and pleasures for evermore." The dread of pollution shall then be past; and the tokens of humiliation be put away. Then shall we "drink new wine in the kingdom of our Father:" and oh! how sweet those draughts, of which, in our present state of separation, it was not permitted us to taste! More encouragement than this we need not, we cannot, have. Let us only contemplate "the blessedness of those who die in the Lord," and we shall need no other inducement to live unto the Lord ———]

APPLICATION—

[The term, Nazarite, imports *separation*: and, though, as has

[n] ver. 20.

has been observed before, the ordinances relative to Nazarites are no longer in force, their duties, in a spiritual view, are obligatory on us. St. Paul says, "Come out from among the ungodly, and be *separate*, and *touch not the unclean thing;* and I will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty." You remember too it was observed, that "God raised up *young* men to be Nazarites." Oh that the young amongst us would be foremost in the surrender of themselves to God! How would the world be benefited! how would God be glorified! ——— With respect to females, a vow of theirs, if not allowed by their father or their husband, was made void; so that they could not separate themselves, as Nazarites, without the permission of those who had the controul over them[c]: but there is no such controlling power now, none to prevent a surrender of our souls to God: the answer to any opposing authority must be, "We ought to obey God rather than men." Let nothing then keep us from executing the purposes which God has inspired; but let us, both old and young, "yield up ourselves as living sacrifices unto God, assured that it is no less a reasonable, than it is an acceptable, service"———]

[c] Numb. xxx. 1—16.

## CI.

### MOSES' INVITATION TO HOBAB.

Numb. x. 29. *And Moses said unto Hobab, the son of Raguel the Midianite, Moses' father-in-law, We are journeying unto the place of which the Lord said, I will give it you. Come thou with us; and we will do thee good: for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel.*

HOBAB, it should seem, was the son of Jethro, who is here called Raguel, and elsewhere Reuel[a]. He was the brother of Zipporah, whom Moses had married in the land of Midian. Both Jethro, and his son Hobab, had accompanied Moses for a season: but Jethro had left him some time since[b]: and Hobab also now proposed to leave him, and "to go back to his own country and kindred." But Moses besought him not to go, but to proceed with Israel to the promised land; assuring him, that, though a Midianite, he should participate in all the blessings which

[a] Exod. ii. 18. [b] Exod. xviii. 27.

which God designed for Israel. On finding that this consideration was not sufficient to influence his mind, Moses urged the services which Hobab might render to Israel in their journey through the wilderness; for though God had undertaken to guide Israel through the wilderness, and to provide for and protect them in the way, yet there were many local circumstances which Hobab was acquainted with, by the communication of which, from time to time, he might render very essential services to Moses and to all Israel.

Whether Moses prevailed with Hobab to alter his determination, does not certainly appear. But it seems rather that he did succeed, because we find the descendants of Hobab actually settled in Canaan, and dwelling in the midst of the tribe of Judah, not indeed as blended with them, but as a distinct people[c]. This however is no importance to *us*. It is the invitation only that we are concerned about: and we hope that, when the arguments with which it is enforced are duly considered, the success with *us* shall not be doubtful, whatever it might be with him. There is a land of promise towards which the true Israel are yet journeying, under the conduct of our great Lawgiver, the Lord Jesus Christ; and in their name is the invitation addressed to all of us; "Come thou with us; and we will do thee good."

But, that we may have clearer views of this matter, let us distinctly consider,

I. The invitation—

That the journey of Israel in the wilderness was altogether typical of our journey heaven-ward, is well known. When therefore, in the name of all Israel, we say to every individual amongst us, "Come thou with us," we must be understood to say,

1. Set your faces in good earnest towards the promised land—

[There is "a land of which God has said, I will give it you." And it is a good land; "a land flowing with milk and honey;" a land "where you shall eat bread without scarceness;" and enjoy

[c] Judg. i. 16. & iv. 11, 17.

enjoy "a rest" from all enemies, and from all labours, for evermore[d]. Towards that land all the Israel of God are journeying: they consider this world as a wilderness, in which they are pilgrims and sojourners; and the object of every step which they take in it is, to advance nearer to their desired home. Let every one of us join himself to them. Let us estimate aright the inheritance prepared for us ——— Let us lose no further time in commencing our journey towards it——— Let us engage in the pursuit of it with all the ardour that the object requires ——— And let us "fear, lest a promise being left us of entering into it, any of us should even seem to come short of it[e]."]

2. Let nothing be suffered to retard you in your progress thitherward—

[Hobab was solicited to postpone all regard for his family and country to the attainment of the promised land. And such is our duty also. Our blessed Lord has said, "He that loveth father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me:" "If any man come to me, and hate not his father and mother, yea, and his own life also (in comparison of me), he cannot be my disciple:" "He that will save his life, shall lose it; and he that loseth his life for my sake, shall find it[f]." There will be difficulties and obstructions which we must meet with; but we must meet them manfully: and, whatever be the cross that lies in our way, we must take it up, yea, and glory in it, and rejoice that we are counted worthy to bear it for His sake. For, what is the favour of man in comparison of the favour of God, or the preservation of earthly interests in comparison of a heavenly inheritance? "What would it profit us if we gained the whole world, if at the same time we lost our own souls? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" Nor let this sacrifice appear great: it is no other than was made by Abraham[g], and Moses[h], and the apostles of our Lord[i], and all the primitive Christians[k]: nay, it is made daily even for the sake of a connexion with an earthly object[l]: much more therefore may it be made for an union with Christ; who offers himself to us only on these express terms; "Hearken, O daughter, and consider, and incline thine ear: forget also thine own people and thy father's house: so shall the King have pleasure in thy beauty: for he is thy Lord, and worship thou him[m]."]

3. Proceed steadily till you are in possession of it—

[Hobab had abode with Moses some considerable time: but at last he grew weary of the way, and determined to return. It must

[d] Heb. iv. 9. 1 Pet. i. 4. [e] Heb. iv. 1.
[f] Matt. x. 37—39. Luke xiv. 26.
[g] Gen. xii. 1—4. [h] Heb. xi. 24—26. [i] Mark x. 28.
[k] Acts iv. 32. [l] Eph. v. 31. [m] Ps. xlv. 10, 11.

must not be thus with us. We must not run well for a season only, but unto the end, if we would obtain the prize. We must "never be weary of well-doing," or "look back after having put our hand to the plough;" but "by patient continuance in well-doing must seek for glory and honour and immortality." "If any one of us turn back," says God, "my soul shall have no pleasure in him." "It were even better for us never to have known the way of righteousness, than, after having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to us." It is "he only who endureth unto the end, that shall ever finally be saved."]

4. Object not, that they who give this invitation are *a mere party*—

[Whose fault is it, if they be a party? Is it theirs who are going heaven-ward; or those who will not advance a step towards it? Are those who "enter in at the strait gate, and walk in the narrow way that leadeth unto life," to be blamed, because the great mass of mankind prefer "the broad road that leadeth to destruction?" But if they must be called a party, let me tell you what party it is: it consists of such as Moses summoned to his aid, "Who is on the Lord's side? let him come unto me[n]:" Yes, they are *those who are "on the Lord's side:"* and if that be a fault, let them bear it. But who is at the head of that party? When we know that it is the Lord Jesus Christ himself[o], and that "the whole world besides lieth under the dominion of the wicked one[p]," we need not be ashamed[p]. If this objection have any force, it had the same force against the Israelites who had come out of Egypt; (for they were but a party, in comparison of those whom they had left behind:) yea, against the apostles and the primitive Christians it lay with still greater force; for they were, especially at first, as nothing in comparison of their opponents. If those who invite us to join them be but "a little flock," still they are the flock to whom exclusively "the kingdom of heaven shall be given[q]:" and therefore we would urge you all to join them without delay.]

To give yet further weight to the invitation, I will call your attention to,

II. The arguments with which it is enforced—

Two considerations Moses proposed to Hobab: first, the benefit that would accrue to himself; and next, the benefit which he would confer on Israel. Similar considerations also may fitly be proposed to us. Consider then, if ye accept the invitation,

1. What

[n] Exod. xxxii. 26. [o] John viii. 23. & xvii. 16.
[p] John xvii. 14, & xv. 18—20. [1] John v. 19.
[q] Luke xii. 32.

1. What benefit will accrue to yourselves—

[Truly, "God has spoken good respecting Israel." He calls them his children, his first-born, his peculiar treasure above all the people upon the face of the earth. And whatever can conduce to their present and eternal happiness, he promises them in the richest abundance. Both in *their way*, and in *their end*, they shall be truly blessed. What a catalogue of blessings is assigned to them in the space of a few verses! yet they relate to this world only, and are but faint shadows of the blessings which God will pour out upon their souls. As for the glory prepared for them in a better world, what tongue can utter it? what heart can conceive it? The very throne of God is not too exalted for them to sit on; nor the kingdom of God too rich for them to possess.

Now then to all who comply with the invitation given them, we do not hesitate to say, as Moses did, "*It shall be*, if thou go with us, *yea, it shall be*, that what goodness the Lord shall do unto us, the same will we do unto thee[r]." You shall partake of every blessing which God's most-favoured people enjoy. Does he go before them in the pillar and the cloud? Does he feed them with manna, and cause the waters from the rock to follow them in all their way? Does he protect them from every enemy? Does he carry them as on eagles' wings? Does he forgive their sins, and "heal their backslidings, and love them freely?" Is "he as the dew to them," causing them to "grow as the lily, and to spread forth their roots as Lebanon?" Does "he love them to the end," and "never leave them till he has fulfilled to them all that he has promised?" All this shall be yours, if you will come with us. "You shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you." You may exhaust all the powers of language in asking, and it shall all be done: you may even stretch your imagination to the utmost bounds that human intellect can reach, and all that also shall be done, and more than all, yea, "exceeding abundantly above all that ye can either ask or think." And shall not this induce you to accept the invitation? Go to all others that solicit your company, and see what they can do for you: can they insure to you even the least of all the blessings of grace or glory? No: they are all broken cisterns, that can hold no water, and can present to you nothing but the dregs of sensual enjoyment; whereas with us is "the fountain of living water," of which whosoever drinks shall live for ever.]

2. What benefit you will confer on others—

[Every one that gives himself up wholly to the Lord, strengthens the hands and encourages the hearts of God's chosen people. Death is from time to time thinning the ranks of the Lord's armies: and if they were not recruited by voluntary enlistment, they would speedily disappear. But all who accept the invitation

[r] ver. 32.

invitation become soldiers of Christ, and engage to fight manfully the Lord's battles. All such persons also are "witnesses for God" amongst an atheistical and rebellious people, whom they practically "condemn," as "Noah condemned the world" by constructing the ark in the midst of them[s]. As lights too in a dark world, they are of great service; for they "hold forth the word of life" to those who would not otherwise behold it; and are "epistles of Christ, known and read" of thousands, who, but for such instructors, would remain for ever ignorant of his will.

If any one be disposed to ask, What good can so weak an individual as I do? I answer, "If under any circumstances whatever any individual could be justified in offering such an objection, it would have been Hobab: first, because Israel were altogether under the divine guidance, protection, and support; and therefore could not be supposed to need any thing; and next, because he was a Midianite, and therefore incapable, as might be thought, of adding any thing to Moses and the Israelites. But to him Moses said, "Thou mayest be to us in the stead of eyes[t]." The truth is, that no one can foresee of what use he may be to the Church of God. Had Peter, when employed in fishing, been told what services he should render to the Jewish nation, or Paul what wonders he should effect in behalf of the Gentile world, how little would they have conceived, that such weak instruments should ever accomplish so great a work! The same may be said of others in later times: and so far is the weakness of the instrument from affording any just ground for discouragement, that God has expressly "committed the Gospel treasure to earthen vessels, on purpose that the excellence of the power may the more clearly appear to be of God:" and it still is, as it has ever been, his delight to "ordain strength in the mouth of babes and sucklings."

Think then, ye who have tasted any thing of redeeming love, is it possible that ye may be useful in promoting the designs, and in advancing the glory of your Lord and Saviour, and will ye not do it? Shall any earthly interests or attachments prevail with you to put your light under a bushel, when, by suffering it to shine forth, you might aid others in their way to heaven? Oh! requite not thus your heavenly Benefactor, but join yourselves to his people without delay, and live henceforth altogether for Him who lived and died for you.]

ADDRESS,

1. Those who have never yet contemplated the invitation given them—

[Our blessed Lord, both in the Old and New Testament, says, "Look unto me," "come unto me," "follow me." But yet, strange as it may appear, we for the most part consider these invitations

[s] Heb. xi. 7. [t] ver. 31.

invitations no more than a mere empty sound; or, if we regard them at all, we satisfy ourselves with vain excuses for refusing them. But, if we wonder at Hobab for proposing to go back, after all that he had seen and heard, what shall be said of us, if we resist all the gracious invitations of the Gospel, after all that we have seen and heard in the New Testament? He was a Midianite by birth and by profession too, whereas we name the name of Christ, and profess ourselves his followers. Let us remember, that the invitation, rejected once, may be lost for ever; and that the Master of the feast, when he hears your vain excuses, may send his invitations to others, and decree that you "shall never taste of his supper."]

2. Those who having once accepted it are disposed to turn back—

[Many such we read of in the Scriptures; and many such we behold amongst ourselves. But, if any who are here present be halting, we would ask them, "To whom will ye go?" Where, but in Christ Jesus, will ye find the words of eternal life[u]? You have not forgotten Lot's wife, or the judgments that overtook her for only looking back to the city whence she had escaped: nor can you reasonably doubt but that they who turn back, "turn back unto perdition[x]." I charge you then, Be stedfast; and harbour not so much as a thought of "returning with the dog to his vomit, and with the sow that was washed to the wallowing in the mire." "If, after you have once escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, you are again entangled therein and overcome, your last end will be worse with you than your beginning[y]." Do not, like Orpah, kiss, and part; but, like Ruth, be stedfast in cleaving to the Lord[z]. Be faithful unto death, and God will give you a crown of life."]

3. Those who, having given themselves up to Christ, are cleaving to him with full purpose of heart—

[You have doubtless met with some trials in your way, and been called to make some sacrifices: for where was there ever a true follower of Christ who had not his cross to bear? Then I will ask you, Have you ever had cause to regret any sacrifice you made for him? He has said, that "if any man leave father and mother, and house and lands, for His sake and the Gospel's, he shall receive an hundred-fold more in this life; and in the world to come, eternal life[a]." Is not this true? Have you not found it to be so by actual experience? Go on, "strong in the Lord and in the power of his might." Only, with Caleb, "follow the Lord fully,"

[u] John vi. 67, 68. [x] Heb. x. 39. [y] 2 Pet. ii. 20.
[z] Ruth i. 14, 17. [a] Mark x. 29, 30.

fully," and you shall with him assuredly obtain a blessed portion in the promised land. "Faithful is He that hath called you; who also will do it."]

## CII.

### MOSES' PRAYER AT THE REMOVAL AND RESTING OF THE ARK.

Numb. x. 35, 36. *And it came to pass, when the ark set forward, that Moses said, Rise up, Lord, and let thine enemies be scattered; and let them that hate thee flee before thee. And when it rested, he said, Return, O Lord, unto the many thousands of Israel.*

PATRIOTISM, according to the general acceptation of the term, consists in such a partial regard for our native land, as would advance the interests of one's own country at the expense of all others, and trample upon the most sacred rights of justice for the attainment of its ends. In this view, it is no better than a specious cloak for cruelty and oppression: but, when freed from selfishness and injustice, it is a good principle, and nearly allied to religion itself. Such was the patriotism of Moses: he wished well to his own country, and sought to promote its best interests. That he sought to occupy the territory of others, is true: but his right to their land was founded on the grant of Jehovah himself, the great Proprietor of heaven and earth: and his desire to possess it originated, not in a thirst for dominion, but in a persuasion that the possession of it was combined with spiritual blessings, and would tend as much to the advancement of God's honour as of Israel's good. He wished ill to none, any further than as they were enemies of Almighty God: it was their opposition to HIM which he prayed to be rendered ineffectual. All his desire was, that Israel might be happy in their God, and in the ultimate possession of those privileges which God, in his sovereign mercy, had destined them to enjoy. This was the one object for which he prayed, whenever

the ark removed, and whenever it became stationary. And from this prayer of his we may learn, what we also should do,

I. In times of trial—

It is not to be expected that we should pass through this wilderness without meeting with manifold trials in our way. The Church of old had much to contend with; and so must every individual that advances towards the heavenly Canaan ———— But our help is in God: and to Him we must look,

1. In earnest prayer—

[Prayer is the appointed means of obtaining succour from above: and it shall prevail when urged with fervent importunity ———— The uplifted hands of Moses prevailed against Amalek more than Joshua's sword: nor can we doubt but that, in all their journeys, the Israelites owed much of their safety to his continual intercession. Without prayer the whole Christian armour would leave him open to the assaults of his enemies: but, with it, he is altogether invincible ———]

2. In humble trust—

[However numerous or powerful our enemies may be, we must remember, that "He who dwelleth on high is mightier." "If He be for us, none can with any effect be against us." With His help "a worm shall thresh the mountains" ———— It is manifest that Moses never doubted for a moment the all-sufficiency of Jehovah: nor should we: but, like David in the most perilous circumstances, we should banish all unbelieving fears with this thought, "The Lord is in his holy temple; the Lord's throne is in heaven" ———]

3. In confident expectation—

[Moses did not pray as to an unknown God, but as to a God whom by experience he knew to be "abundant in goodness and truth." Thus we should have our expectations raised: we should ask in faith, persuaded and assured that "God will do more for us than we can either ask or think" ———— If we were "not straitened in ourselves," we should not find ourselves straitened in our God.]

Similar to this should be our conduct,

II. In seasons of rest—

There were even in the Apostolic age some seasons when "the Churches had rest:" and there are times

times of comparative rest which the saints experience in every age. But these are pregnant with danger to the soul no less than times of trial. At those seasons we are apt to relax our vigilance, and to be "settled on our lees." It becomes us therefore, *then* more especially, to seek the presence of our God; to seek it,

1. As our only safeguard—

[Moses never deemed himself secure but under the divine protection. Hence he was as anxious to have God present with his people in their resting-places, as in their removals. We too, though apparently in peace, must remember, that "the roaring lion that seeketh to devour us" never rests; he is ever going about, and ready to "take advantage of us" to our ruin. In God, and in him alone, is our safety. If He guide us, we shall not err: if He uphold us, we shall not fall: if He be a wall of fire round about us, we may bid defiance to all the assaults of earth and hell———]

2. As our supreme happiness—

[At no time should we suffer ourselves to rest in created enjoyments: they are then only conducive to real happiness, when we can enjoy God in them. All, without him, is but "as the crackling of thorns under a pot"———To have his presence in the ordinances, and in the closet, and in our own hearts, *this* is life, *this* is peace, this is "joy that is unspeakable and glorified." *This* therefore we should covet beyond all created good; and every moment that we are bereft of this, we should consider as lost to all the great ends and purposes of life———]

Address,

1. Those who are ignorant of God—

[Do not despise the idea of communion with God: there is a time coming, when you yourselves will wish for it. A dying man is a piteable object indeed without the divine presence. But if we seek it not *now*, what reason have we to expect it in a dying hour?———]

2. Those who indulge unbelieving fears respecting him—

[How greatly do you dishonour the God of Israel! See how he attended his people of old, going before them in their journeys, and abiding with them in their resting-places; and is he not the same God still? O blush and be ashamed, that ever ye have limited his power and grace. Only live nigh to him in the exercise of faith and prayer, and you cannot but be happy in time and in eternity.]

3. Those who enjoy his presence;—

[Be, like Moses, true patriots. Consider "the many thousands of Israel," and let them ever have a remembrance in your prayers. Seek for them, as well as for yourselves, God's blessing and protection. To be intercessors for the Church is an employment worthy the attention of the highest Potentates: at the same time "the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man," however low he be in the scale of society, "availeth much." And they who bring down blessings on the Church by prayer, shall be sure to have no small portion of them resting on their own souls.]

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## CIII.

### INORDINATE DESIRE PUNISHED.

Numb. xi. 10—13. *Then Moses heard the people weep throughout their families, every man in the door of his tent. And the anger of the Lord was kindled greatly: Moses also was displeased. And Moses said unto the Lord, Wherefore hast thou afflicted thy servant? and wherefore have I not found favour in thy sight, that thou layest the burthen of all this people upon me? Have I conceived all this people? have I begotten them, that thou shouldest say unto me, Carry them in thy bosom, (as a nursing father beareth the sucking child,) unto the land which thou swarest unto their fathers? Whence should I have flesh to give unto all this people? for they weep unto me, saying, Give us flesh, that we may eat.*

TRULY humiliating are the views which the Scripture gives us of human instability. Who would have thought that the zeal which all the princes of Israel manifested in furnishing the tabernacle[a] should so soon vanish? The first journey which they have to perform, fills them all with discontent: it being continued three days without intermission, all complain of the length of the way. Some are signally punished by the Lord, being struck dead by fire: but the survivors, neither awed by the judgments inflicted on others, nor won by the mercy shewn to themselves, soon murmur again for want of variety in their food. At this, Moses is deeply grieved, and God is greatly offended. That the different circumstances may come easily under our review, we shall notice in succession;

I. The

[a] Numb. vii.

I. The sin of Israel—

They were discontented with the food which God had given them—

[They wanted flesh to eat, that they might gratify their palates; and were so vexed for want of it as to "weep in all their tents." To excuse these inordinate desires, they complained, that they were emaciated by subsisting only on such insipid food as God had provided for them[b]. They invidiously compared their state in Egypt with their present state; omitting all which they had suffered there, and magnifying the comforts which they had there enjoyed———Thus they misrepresented both their past and present condition, that they might the better conceal their ingratitude, and justify their complaints.]

This was nothing less than a contempt of God himself[c]—

[What had not God done for them? What more could he have done? He had brought them out of Egypt with a high hand; and had overwhelmed their enemies in the Red Sea: he had been their Guide and Protector in all their way: he had given them bread from heaven, and water out of the Rock: had revealed unto them his will, and taken them into a peculiar relation to himself above all the people upon the face of the earth; and yet, all that he had done was accounted as nothing, because they wanted flesh to eat. Is it possible to conceive a greater contempt of God than this?———]

Such a sin is discontent, in whomsoever it is found—

[There are many things in this world which a discontented mind will pant after or regret. But the indulging of such a disposition is rebellion against the Sovereign Disposer of all events; yea, it is an utter contempt of him. What! is it not sufficient to have God for our Father, Christ for our Saviour, the Spirit for our Comforter, and heaven for our everlasting inheritance, but must we murmur and complain because all temporal circumstances are not to our mind? What signifies any temporal want or loss, when we have such unsearchable riches secured to us? In comparison of such blessings, the greatest of earthly comforts is no more than the dust upon the balance. But this, alas! we are too apt to forget: we are ready, like the Israelites, to overlook all the mercies we enjoy, through an excessive regret of something lost, or an inordinate desire of something unpossessed.]

When we reflect on the exceeding baseness of this conduct, we shall not wonder at,

II. The

[b] ver. 6. [c] ver. 20. "Ye have *despised* the Lord," &c.

II. The grief of Moses—

We cannot altogether approve of the manner in which Moses expressed his sorrow—

[He not only complained *to* God, but in reality complained *of* God himself. God had appointed him to lead that people to the land of Canaan. This should have been considered by him as a singular honour: but he complains of it as a burthen. Not that he would ever have complained of it, if the people had walked worthy of their high calling: but when they were dissatisfied and rebellious, it seemed to him as if all his labour had been in vain. Had he been their natural father, he would have thought it reasonable enough that he should take the oversight of them: but when he had no other relation to them than that which was common to all, he deemed it an hardship to have so great a charge committed to him; and he begged that God would release him from it by taking away his life———Alas! what is human nature when it comes to be severely tried!———]

But from this we learn some very important lessons—

[We learn what the Ministerial office is. God says to a Minister, "Take this people," and, "as a nursing father carried his sucking child" through the wilderness, where there were no other means for its conveyance, so do you "carry them in your bosom," bearing with all their frowardness, attending to all their wants, administering to all their necessities, and seeking your happiness in their welfare." Oh! what a charge is this! and what grace do *they* need who have to sustain and execute it!———O that all of us resembled Paul[d]!———

We learn also, what a Minister's heaviest affliction is. If his people be obedient to their God, great as his difficulties are, he is willing to bear them: his people are "his joy and crown of rejoicing:" "he lives, when they stand fast in the Lord:" "he has no greater joy than to see his children walk in truth." But when they decline from the ways of God, when they are dissatisfied with his ministrations, and begin to despise the bread of life, because it is plain and unmixed with any thing suited to a carnal appetite, then he is grieved, and wounded in his inmost soul; then life itself becomes a burthen to him, and he is ready to wish for death to put a period to his sorrows. We remember how Paul was grieved by the worldliness and sensuality of some, and by the heretical conduct of others: he could not speak of them without tears[e]; and he was always like a woman in travail, by reason of his anxiety for their welfare[f]. "The care of all the churches" was a heavier burthen to him than all his own perils and dangers, whether by sea or land. "None were weak, but he was weak also;"

[d] 1 Thess. ii. 7, 8. [e] Phil. iii. 18, 19. [f] Gal. iv. 19.

also;" nor were any offended and turned aside, but "he burned" with an ardent desire to restore them. O that every Minister were thus wrapped up in the good of the people committed to his care! "His afflictions may abound; but his consolations shall abound" also.]

That which so deeply afflicted Moses, excited, in a very high degree,

III. The displeasure of God—

It is instructive to observe in *what manner* God manifested his displeasure—

[He granted their wishes, and sent them such abundance of quails, that for many miles round their camp they lay above a yard thick upon the ground. The people with great avidity began to gather them up. For two whole days and a night did they occupy themselves in this work, so he who gathered least among them, gathered ten homers, or eighty bushels. Now they began to revel upon the spoil; but whilst the flesh was in their mouths, even before it was chewed, God smote them with a very great plague, whereof many thousands of them died[g]——— How strongly did God mark their sin in their punishment!]

But we are peculiarly interested in *the end* for which he thus displayed his indignation—

[He expressly tells us, that it was for our sakes, and to make them ensamples unto us[h]. He designed to teach us "not to lust after evil things, as they lusted." O that we could learn that lesson, and take warning by them! We are ready to think it a light matter to be dissatisfied with what we have, and to be longing for what we have not: but God has shewn us that he does not account it light: he deems it a contempt of him and of the rich mercies he has vouchsafed unto us; and as such, he will sooner or later visit it with fiery indignation———]

Suffer ye then, Brethren, a word of EXHORTATION—

1. Guard against the contagion of bad example—

[It was "the mixed multitude" who first began to murmur[i]; and from them the dissatisfaction spread through all the tents of Israel. Thus did Judas infect all the disciples[k]. Thus shall we ever find it in the Church: "a little leaven is sufficient to leaven the whole lump." If there be any one of a carnal, worldly, querulous and contentious spirit, be sure to let him have no influence over your mind. Reject his counsels as poison; and follow none any further than they follow Christ———]

2. Culti-

[g] ver. 32, 33. with Ps. lxxviii. 17—31. [h] 1 Cor. x. 6, 10, 11.
[i] ver. 4. They were Egyptians, who accompanied the Israelites.
[k] Compare Matt. xxvi. 7—9. with John xii. 4—6.

2. Cultivate a contented spirit—

[" Be contented with such things as ye have." 'Tis better to have little with a devout spirit, than abundance, and "leanness of soul withal." God shewed that it was not from any want of power that he did not feed them every day with flesh; but because he knew that it would be productive of no good to their souls. Think not that it is from any want of love or power that he suffers you to be tried in a variety of ways. He could easily carry you on without any trials, and give you all that the most carnal heart could desire. But trials are the fruits of his love: he desires to instruct you in every part of your duty; that you may "know both how to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need." "Learn then in every thing to be content," and to say from your hearts in all things, "Not my will, but thine be done."]

3. Expect from God all that is truly good for you—

[Moses himself staggered at the promise, when God said, that all the people should feed on flesh for a whole month[l]: but God said to him, "Is the Lord's hand waxed short? Thou shalt see now whether my word shall come to pass unto thee or not[m]." His promises to us also are "exceeding great and precious," both in relation to our bodies and our souls ——— Let us never presume to "limit the Holy One of Israel," as though any thing which he has promised, were either too great, or too good, for him to give. The trials which he sends us, are often sent on purpose that we may see the exceeding riches of his grace in our deliverance. For temporal things, let us depend entirely on his good Providence; and for spiritual things, on his all-sufficient grace. In Christ Jesus there is a fulness of all that we can want; and "out of his fulness we may all receive" from day to day ———]

[l] ver. 21, 22. [m] ver. 23.

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## CIV.

### JOSHUA'S ENVY REPROVED.

Numb. xi. 27—29. *And there ran a young man, and told Moses, and said, Eldad and Medad do prophesy in the camp. And Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of Moses, one of his young men, answered and said, My lord Moses, forbid them. And Moses said unto him, Enviest thou for my sake? Would God that all the Lord's people were prophets, and that the Lord would put his spirit upon them!*

EXPERIENCE proves that eminent situations are attended with manifold anxieties; and that Rulers,

Rulers, though envied by their subjects, often feel a weight of care which is burthensome in the extreme. Moses was supported in his office by God himself, who confirmed his authority by many signal and miraculous interpositions: yet even he complained, "I am not able to bear all this people alone, because it is too heavy for me[a]."

To relieve him from the burthen, God promised, that he would pour out his Spirit upon Seventy Elders, whom Moses should select, and would qualify them for taking a share in the government. Two of the persons nominated, (being deterred, it should seem, by a sense of their own insufficiency for the office,) staid in the camp, instead of going up with the others to the tabernacle at the time appointed. God however did not on this account withhold his Spirit from them, but gave it to them in the same manner as to the others: in consequence of which they began to prophesy in the camp. This innovation excited the jealousy of Joshua; who, fearing lest it should weaken the authority of Moses, instantly informed him of it, and desired him to forbid any further exercise of their gifts: but Moses saw through the hidden motives by which he was actuated, and checked the evil which had risen in his heart.

Let us consider,

I. The principle he indulged—

Doubtless, Joshua thought that he was acting under a good impression, and that his zeal was of the purest kind: but Moses traces his conduct to a principle of envy, which needed to be mortified and suppressed. Now envy is,

1. A common principle—

[Few are conscious of it in themselves; but all see the operation of it in their neighbours. There is not any evil in the heart of man more universally prevalent than this. "It is not in vain that the Scripture saith, The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy[b]." We may see in Cain, in Joseph's brethren, in Saul, and in all the Rulers of the Jewish Church, that this disposition is natural

[a] ver. 14. [b] Jam. iv. 5.

natural to man[c]. Infants at the breast have been seen to feel its malignant influence, when another has been permitted to participate what they have deemed their exclusive right. There is no age, no situation, exempt. Even those who possess the most, as well as those who are wholly destitute, are open to its assaults ———]

2. An active principle—

[Whatever is an object of desire, is also an object of envy: for envy is nothing but a regret that another should possess that which we ourselves would wish to enjoy. Usually indeed the things which persons most envy, are such as are proper to their own age or condition in life; and such as they think themselves in some measure entitled to. Those in whom beauty or strength is highly valued, look not with complacency on one who is reckoned to surpass them: nor do those who desire fame on account of mental qualifications, love to acknowledge the intellectual superiority of others. All are happy to hear their rivals depreciated, and themselves preferred. Nor is it respecting natural endowments only that this principle exerts itself; it shews itself no less in reference to acquired distinctions, of whatever kind. Riches and honours are amongst the objects which most powerfully excite this corrupt feeling: and it is difficult for any one to behold the more rapid advancement of his rival, and not to feel in himself some workings of this malignant disposition.

But this principle operates even where personal considerations appear very feeble and remote. The exaltation of a party, for instance, will call it forth in those who belong to an opposite party. There scarcely ever is a popular election, but the partizans of rival candidates are open to its assaults, as much as the principals themselves. Parties in the Church are no less agitated by this corroding passion, insomuch that they will endeavour to outstrip each other in things to which they have no real inclination, in order by any means to gain an ascendancy for their own side. In the days of the Apostles, "some preached Christ of envy and strife;" and there is but too much reason to fear, that many also in this day have no better motive for their benevolent and religious exertions, than the strengthening and increasing of a party in the Church.]

3. A deep-rooted principle—

[One would suppose that religion should presently and entirely extirpate this principle: but it is not so easily rooted out. We find it working in persons who professed to have a zeal for God[d]; yea, in persons also of whose piety we cannot doubt. The disciples of John were alarmed for the honour of their Master, when they heard that Jesus had more disciples than he[e]: and the Apostles

[c] 1 John iii. 12. Acts vii. 9. 1 Sam. xviii. 9. Matt. xxvii. 18.
[d] 1 Cor. iii. 1—4. [e] John iii. 26.

Apostles themselves forbad a person to persist in the work of casting out devils, because he did not attach himself to them[f]. This was the very spirit by which Joshua was actuated: he was afraid lest the honour and influence of Moses should be weakened by others rising into popularity around him. Of course, this disposition is not wilfully indulged by any who truly fear God: but it is so rooted in the heart, that all have need to be on their guard against it.]

The hatefulness of such a principle may be seen by,

II. The reproof it met with—

Moses appears truly as a Man of God. Behold, in his answer to Joshua,

1. His fidelity—

[He had a peculiar regard for Joshua: but that did not cause him to overlook his faults, much less to countenance him in what was wrong. Young men in general are apt to be led away by their feelings, and not to be sufficiently aware of their own corruptions. This was the case with Joshua: and Moses, like a father, watched over him with care, and reproved him with tenderness. Moses pointed out to him the principle by which he was actuated, and that higher principle by which he ought rather to be governed. It would be well if all religious people were equally on their guard, to check, rather than encourage, the growth of evil. If a person be of our party, and more especially if he be our friend, we are ready to receive his reports, without very strict inquiry, and to accede to his proposals, without sufficient care. Hence one person in a society sometimes diffuses throughout the whole a spirit of strife and contention, when, if the erroneousness of his views had been pointed out at first, the peace of the whole body might have been preserved. Great attention therefore do we recommend to all in this particular. More especially would we remind professing Christians of their duty; "Thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy brother, and not suffer sin upon him[g]." We should not be contented with a specious suggestion. We should dread the incursion of an evil principle in the Church, as much as we do the introduction of fire in a place filled with combustibles. We should ever remember, that "a little leaven will soon leaven the whole lump."]

2. His zeal—

[The glory of God was that which was uppermost in the mind of Moses: and if that might but be advanced, he was quite indifferent whether his own honour were eclipsed or not. He well knew, that these two men "could have nothing except it were given

[f] Mark ix. 38. [g] Lev. xix. 17.

given them from above[h]; and that if God had given them the gift of prophecy, he would overrule the exercise of it for his own glory. Instead therefore of wishing to repress it in them, he would have been glad if every person in the camp had possessed it. What a noble spirit was this! how worthy of universal imitation! It was precisely thus that St. Paul rejoiced, when "Christ was preached of contention." He knew the motives of the preachers to be bad; but he knew that God would render their ministrations subservient to the increase of the Redeemer's kingdom: and therefore, however their conduct might affect his influence, he did, and would, rejoice[i]. Thus, Beloved, should we be glad to see the Redeemer's interests advanced, whoever be the instruments, and whatever be the means. This consideration should be paramount to every other; and we should say, with John, "Let me, and my party, decrease, so that Christ and his kingdom may but increase[k]."]

3. His love—

[Moses had no desire to engross or monopolize the gifts of Heaven. As Paul said to his bitterest persecutors, "I would to God that all who hear me this day were both almost and altogether such as I am, except these bonds[l]," so did Moses wish all the people of Israel to have the Spirit of the Lord imparted to them, as much as he himself had. The more they were benefited, the more would his happiness be increased. This is that very disposition which St. Paul exercised himself[m], and which he inculcates on us, when he says, "Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others[n]." In fact, this is that principle, which, more than any other, counteracts the baneful influence of envy; "Charity envieth not[o]." Let universal love reign in our hearts, and, instead of envying any of our brethren, we shall be willing rather to "lay down our lives for them[p]."]

To IMPROVE this subject, we would recommend to you two things;

1. Examine well your own principles—

[Do not hastily conclude that your principles are right, even though you do not know that they are wrong; but search and try your ways, and maintain a godly jealousy over your own hearts. The apostles themselves, on more occasions than one, "knew not what spirit they were of." Who amongst us does not see the blindness of others in relation to their principles? Pride, and ostentation, and vanity, and envy, and malice, and a thousand other evils, are visible enough to others, when the persons influenced

[h] This was John's answer; Mark ix. 39.
[i] Phil. i. 15—18.
[k] John iii. 30.
[l] Acts xxvi. 29.
[m] 1 Cor. iv. 9.
[n] Phil. ii. 4.
[o] 1 Cor. xv. 4.
[p] 1 John iii. 16.

fluenced by them give themselves credit for very different motives. Doubtless, at times, this is the case with all of us. If indeed envy become in any respect a governing principle in our hearts, our religion is altogether vain[q]. Let us therefore watch our own spirits, and be thankful to any friend, who, like Moses, will "point out to us a more excellent way[r]."]

2. Take diligent heed to the word of God—[s]

[The word of God, if duly attended to, would correct every bad principle in us. It is a two-edged sword, that lays open the inmost recesses of the heart[s]. To that St. Peter directs us, as the means of subduing envy, and every other evil propensity[t]. By the word the apostles themselves were sanctified; and by that also must we be made clean[u]. Meditate then on that day and night: and let it be your earnest prayer, that it may dwell richly in you in all wisdom; and that, being cast into the mould of the Gospel, you may be "changed into the divine image, from glory to glory, by the Spirit of the Lord."]

[q] Jam. iii. 14—16. [r] 1 Cor. xii. 31. [s] Heb. iv. 12.
[t] 1 Pet. ii. 1—3. [u] John xv. 3. & xvii. 17.

## CV.

### AARON AND MIRIAM REPROVED.

Numb. xii. 8, 9. *Wherefore were ye not afraid to speak against my servant Moses? And the anger of the Lord was kindled against them: and he departed.*

WHEN men are angry, we may often, and with reason, doubt, whether there be any just occasion for their displeasure: but when we see Almighty God expressing indignation, we may always ask with confidence, "Is there not a cause?" It is no slight degree of anger which God manifests in the passage before us. And what could be the reason? We are told that "Aaron and Miriam spake against Moses because of the Ethiopian woman whom he had married[a]." But this seems only to have been, if not a fictitious, at least a secondary reason. (It must be strange indeed if they now began to be displeased with a thing which they knew to have been done many years, and which had never, in that instance, been disapproved by God.) The true reason, I apprehend,

[a] ver. 1.

apprehend, was, that they were offended at his not having consulted them about the seventy persons whom he had selected to bear a part of his burthen with him: and it is possible enough that they might ascribe this to his wife's influence. They thought, that, as God had spoken by them as well as by Moses himself[b], Moses should have treated them with more respect. (This is precisely the way in which many, yea and good people too, are prone to act. If overlooked in any instance wherein they think they had a right to be consulted, they forget all the distinguishing honours which they already enjoy, and become querulous on account of the supposed slight which is cast upon them———) Of this complaint Moses took no notice; but meekly passed it over in silence. (Herein he shews how unreasonable murmurers and complainers should be treated. Would to God we were more like him in this particular! If querulous objections be met by passionate answers, contentions soon arise[c]; whereas silence, or "a soft answer, would turn away wrath.") But the less anxious we are to vindicate our own character, the more readily and effectually will God interpose for us. "He heard," though Moses was as one that heard not; and he immediately summoned the offenders before him, in their presence vindicated the character of his servant Moses, and smote Miriam with a leprosy: and though, at the request of Moses, he restored her to health, yet he ordered her to be put out of the camp for seven days; and thus exposed to shame the persons, who, through the pride of their hearts, had arrogated to themselves an honour which belonged not to them.

On account of the importance of these subordinate circumstances, we have dwelt upon them somewhat longer than usual. But it is not our intention to enlarge any more on them: we wish rather to turn your

[b] Compare ver. 2. with Mic. vi. 4.

[c] The common history of quarrels is, that they begin like those of the ambitious disciples, and proceed like those of the jealous tribes. Matt xx. 21, 24. 2 Sam. xix. 43.

your attention to the great and leading points contained in the words of our text. In *them*, God expostulates with Aaron and Miriam for presuming to speak against Moses. Now Moses sustained a variety of characters; in reference to which the words before us may be differently understood. As he was a *Civil Magistrate*, they shew God's anger against those who resist the magistracy. As he was a *Teacher of God's word*, they shew how God is offended with a neglect of his faithful Ministers. And, as he was *a representative of our great Lawgiver and Redeemer*, the Lord Jesus Christ, they shew what indignation God will exercise against those who either openly reject, or secretly despise, his only dear Son.

First then we shall consider them as expressing God's displeasure against those,

I. Who oppose the Civil Magistrate—

[Magistrates are appointed of God to bear a portion of *his* authority; and they are invested with it, that they may be a terror to evil-doers, and a protection to the good. To these we are to be subject, not reluctantly through fear of their displeasure, but willingly, and for conscience sake: and "if we will resist them, we shall receive to ourselves damnation [d]." Both temporal and eternal judgments must be expected by us if we rebel against the constituted authorities. Nor is it of open and avowed rebellion only that we speak, but of murmuring and complaining against them without just and great occasion. This was the fault of Aaron and Miriam; "they were not afraid to *speak against*" the person, whom God had ordained to be "king in Jeshurun." Persons of this class are invariably represented by God himself as enemies to HIM. "Presumptuous are they, says he, and self-willed, and are not afraid to speak evil of dignities [e]." They take liberties with earthly Potentates, which the first Archangel dared not to take with Satan himself [f]. It would be well if religious people were sufficiently on their guard respecting this. We have seen, during the French Revolution, great multitudes even of *them* drawn after Satan; and the supporters of civil government traduced by every opprobrious epithet: and though the generality of these deluded people have seen their error, yet the necessity for cautioning you on this head has not ceased. That the rights of people are very different in different countries, is certain; and that Rulers *may* so conduct themselves, as totally to destroy the compact between them and their subjects, is also certain:

[d] Rom. xiii. 1—5. [e] 2 Pet. ii. 10. [f] Jude 8, 9.

certain: but it is no less certain, that religious people, above all, should be "the quiet in the land," and should ever conform to that solemn injunction, "Thou shalt not speak evil of the Ruler of thy people[g]."

## II. Who disregard the Ministers of the Gospel—

[Those who minister in holy things are ambassadors from God, and speak to the people "in Christ's stead[h]." Their word, as far as it accords with the inspired volume, is "to be received, not as the word of men, but as the word of God himself[i]:" and whatever, in the name and by the authority of God, they bid you to observe, that you are bound to observe and do[k]. It is true, that Ministers are "not lords over God's heritage[l]," neither have they any "dominion over your faith[m]:" yet it is also true, that in things pertaining to God they are invested with a divine authority: they "are over you in the Lord[n]:" they "have the rule over you, and you are to obey them, and submit yourselves[o]:" and if, while "they labour in the word and doctrine, they rule well, they are to be counted worthy of double honour[p]." What shall we say then to those who despise the Ministers of God, and that too in proportion to their fidelity? This we must say, that "in despising us, they despise both Christ, and the Father who sent him[q]:" and their opposition to such Ministers is felt by God as opposition to himself[r]; such opposition too as will meet with a dreadful recompence in the day of judgment[s]. What Moses had said and done, was by the direction and authority of God: and it was at the peril of the greatest people of the land to contradict and oppose him.]

## III. Who neglect the Lord Jesus Christ—

[Moses, as the head of the Church and people of God, certainly prefigured the Lord Jesus Christ. The very encomiums here passed on Moses by God himself, are such as of necessity lead our minds to Christ. Was Moses a prophet far superior to all others[t]? Christ is that Prophet of whom Moses was only a shadow, and whom all are commanded to hear at the peril of their souls[u]. Was Moses faithful in all God's house as a servant[x]? Christ is that Son who presides over his own house[y]. Was Moses the meekest of all men upon the face of the earth[z]? Christ is he whose unparalleled meekness is our great encouragement to learn of him[a]. In reference to Christ therefore, the expostulation in our text has tenfold weight. Oh, who must not be afraid to speak

[g] Acts xxiii. 5.
[h] 2 Cor. v. 20.
[i] 1 Thess. ii. 13.
[k] Matt. xxiii. 2, 3.
[l] 1 Pet. v. 3.
[m] 2 Cor. i. 24.
[n] 1 Thess. v. 12.
[o] Heb. xiii. 17.
[p] 1 Tim. v. 17.
[q] Luke x. 16.
[r] Zech. ii. 8.
[s] Matt. xviii. 6.
[t] ver. 6, 7.
[u] Acts iii. 22, 23.
[x] ver. 7.
[y] Heb. iii. 2—6.
[z] ver. 3.
[a] Matt. xi. 29.

speak against HIM, or to entertain so much as a thought contrary to HIS honour?

Here then we have not to address the unbelievers; for they may well be classed under the former head: those who openly reject Christ, cannot even in profession obey his Ministers. But many who are partial to faithful Ministers, are yet far from being conformed to the mind of Christ. Many who are in high repute in the Church of Christ, have yet their unsubdued lusts, which rise in allowed hostility against their Lord and Saviour. The murmurs of Aaron and Miriam were not public; but "The Lord heard them." And so these vile affections may not be known; but God sees them: and he will, if we continue to harbour them, be "a swift witness against us"———

With what awful authority did he summon Aaron and Miriam before him[b]! But with a more awful voice will he call us forth to judgment. With what indignation did he, after reproving their iniquity, "*depart*[c]!" and will he not depart from such professors *here;* yea, and bid them to depart from him *for ever?* Did he expose their sin to all? did he inflict a most disgraceful punishment? Did he order Miriam to be excluded from the camp of Israel[d]? Who reads not here the shame and misery of those, who under a cloak of religion, have harboured any secret lusts? Were the most distinguished characters in the whole kingdom dealt with thus? Who then has not reason to fear and tremble? "Be wise now therefore, O ye kings, be instructed ye judges of the earth. O kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way[e]." Behold, the sin of these two professors delayed the progress of all the hosts of Israel for seven days[f]! Armed hosts, or intervening seas, could not retard them: but sin, that evil and accursed thing, did what all the powers of earth and hell could not have done. O professor, think how many may be retarded in their progress towards heaven by one sin of thine; yea perhaps may be turned out of the way, and ruined for ever! Remember what our Lord has said, "Woe unto the world because of offences? but woe, most of all, unto him, by whom the offence cometh." It is on this account that God enjoined all his people to "bear in mind what he had done to Miriam by the way, after that they were come forth out of Egypt[g]." The Lord grant that none of us may ever lose sight of it! May we remember what an evil and bitter thing it is to lose in any degree the fear and love of God[h]!]

ADDRESS—

[To those who have sinned in any of the foregoing particulars, we would particularly recommend, that, like Aaron, they confess

[b] ver. 4, 5. [c] ver. 9. [d] ver. 10, 14.
[e] Ps. ii. 10—12. [f] ver. 15. [g] Deut. xxiv. 9.
[h] Jer. ii. 19.

confess their sin humbly, and without delay[i]. Yea, intreat of that very Saviour whose authority you have despised, to intercede for you. Seek an interest in him: implore forgiveness for his sake: so will God "pardon your offences, though he may take vengeance of your inventions[k]." "Turn with unfeigned sorrow from your transgressions; so your iniquity shall not be your ruin." Leprous as ye are, ye shall yet be healed: and, deserving as ye are to be expelled from the camp of Israel, ye shall yet be received into it, and, through the tender mercy of your God, shall proceed in comfort to the promised land.]

[i] ver. 11. [k] ver. 13, 14.

## CVI.

### THE PEOPLE MURMURING AT THE REPORT OF THE SPIES.

Numb. xiv. 6—9. *And Joshua the son of Nun, and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, which were of them that searched the land, rent their clothes. And they spake unto all the company of the children of Israel, saying, The land, which we passed through to search it, is an exceeding good land. If the Lord delight in us, then he will bring us into this land, and give it us; a land which floweth with milk and honey. Only rebel not ye against the Lord, neither fear ye the people of the land; for they are bread for us: their defence is departed from them; and the Lord is with us: fear them not.*

WHEN actions originate in an evil principle, however specious they be, the motives from whence they proceed cannot long be hidden: a thousand things in the course of time will arise to elicit truth, and to discover the principles which we fondly hoped to conceal. The proposal of sending spies to search out the land, appears, from the first verse of the preceding chapter, to have been first made by God; but in fact it arose from the Israelites themselves: the whole body of the people took a lively interest in it, and came, by their representatives at least, to request that Moses would accede to it. Moses, taking it as a symptom of their readiness to go and possess the land, was highly delighted with it[a]; and consulted God respecting it. God knowing the thoughts

[a] Deut. i. 22, 23.

thoughts of their hearts, and seeing that their faith in him was not so strong but that they needed to have it confirmed by further testimony, consented; just as the Baptist did to his disciples, when they wanted to ascertain whether Jesus were the Christ[b]: he bore with their weakness, and permitted them to seek conviction in their own way. But when the spies "brought up an evil report of the land which they had searched," the people instantly betrayed their unbelieving fears, and drew from Caleb and Joshua the remonstrance which we have just read.

That we may have a full view of the subject, we shall consider,

I. The remonstrance itself—

Let us examine,

1. The occasion of it—

[The spies who were sent, were twelve in number, one from every tribe. Of these, no less than ten agreed in representing the land as unconquerable. The inhabitants, they said, were giants, in comparison of whom they themselves were but "as grasshoppers;" and they dwelt in "walled cities" that were impregnable. They represented too the climate as so unhealthy, that "the land ate up its inhabitants[c]." (God had, *according to his promise*, sent either hornets, or some kind of plague, to destroy the people before them[d]; and *this* they turned into a ground of *discouragement*!) The goodness of the land indeed they could not deny; because they had brought such a sample of its fruits, as was a clear proof of its luxuriant fertility[e]. On hearing the report, the congregration gave way to utter despondency: they "wept the whole night:" they wished they had "died either in Egypt, or in the wilderness:" they complained that God had brought them thither *on purpose* to destroy them: they declared it would be better for them at once to return to Egypt; and they *actually appointed*[f] a captain over them, to lead them thither.

What "madness is there in the heart of man[g]"! Who would conceive it possible, that that whole nation should so soon forget all their past deliverances, and form so strange a resolution as that of returning to Egypt? This was an expedient more impracticable in its nature than the conquest of Canaan, and more dreadful in its consequences than death itself upon the field of battle

[b] Matt. xi. 2, 3.
[c] Exod. xiii. 28, 31—33.
[d] Exod. xxiii. 28.
[e] Exod. xiii. 23.
[f] This is not mentioned by Moses; but it is asserted by Nehemiah: Neh. ix. 17.
[g] Eccl. ix. 3.

battle[h]— — — Yet, such is the effect of discontent: it magnifies every difficulty; undervalues every enjoyment; and rushes upon evils greater than those which it attempts to shun.]

2. The manner—

[The boldness of Joshua and Caleb, in opposing all their colleagues together with the whole congregation of Israel, was truly commendable. That it was at no little risk they ventured to remonstrate, is evident from the effect: for no sooner had they spoken, than all the people threatened to stone them; and would undoubtedly have carried their menace into immediate execution, if God himself had not interposed, by a signal manifestation of his glory, to restrain them[i]. But they would have accounted themselves happy to suffer martyrdom in such a cause. And this is the very courage which we also should possess. We should be witnesses for God in a degenerate world. We should never be deterred from testifying against sin, either by the number or authority of our opponents. If even we stood alone, as Elijah did, it would become us to maintain the truth with stedfastness, and to venture life itself in the service of our Lord.

Supposing these Remonstrants not to be intimidated, we might expect them to be filled with indignation at the wickedness of the people, and to give vent to their feelings in terms of severity and reproach. But behold, they are penetrated with grief; and "rend their clothes" for anguish of heart: and in their whole address they exhibit a beautiful specimen of "the meekness of wisdom." O that there were in all of us such an heart! that we could weep over sinners, instead of being angry with them; and that we could "in meekness instruct them that oppose themselves," bearing with their frowardness, and pitying their perverseness! This union of fortitude and compassion is the very thing which we should labour to acquire, and which alone can fit us for reproving with effect.]

3. The matter—

[Nothing could be more judicious than this address. The people had lost sight of God; and their faithful monitors set God before them. They acknowledge the existence of the difficulties; but they deny the inference deduced from it. True, say they, the people are mighty; but our God is mightier: their fortifications are strong; but not so strong that they can withstand God: the inhabitants fight only with an arm of flesh; we with the arm of the Living God: What then have we to fear? they, how numerous or powerful soever, are only as "bread for us," and shall be devoured by us as easily as the food we eat. We

[h] Could they expect God to follow them with miraculous supplies of bread and water; or their state in Egypt to be better than before?

[i] ver. 10.

We have nothing to do but to trust in God; and we are as sure of victory, as if all our enemies were already slain. Let us go up then; not to *conquer* the land, but "to *possess* it:" the food is prepared for us; and we have nothing to do but to go up and eat it[k].

How encouraging was this! how calculated to carry conviction to their hearts! not one word to irritate, but every thing to convince and comfort them! This is the true pattern for reproof: as it should never savour of our own spirit, so it should never touch on painful topics but with care and tenderness: every syllable should breathe love. It is a proverb in France, that 'Flies are not caught with vinegar:' and we shall do well to remember, that it is the sweet alone which renders the sour palatable. Faithful indeed we must be, and so faithful as oftentimes to give offence: but we must take care that the offence arise, not from any needless severity on our part, but from the force of truth itself.]

Having noticed the remonstrance, it will be proper to consider,

II. The use we should make of it—

In the Epistle to the Hebrews (chapters 3. & 4.) the Apostle traces the correspondence between the events we are considering and the duties of Christians in all ages. He shews that Canaan represented the Rest which remains for us; and he cautions us against falling short of it through unbelief, as that people did. Hence it is evident that the address delivered to them by Joshua and Caleb may with great propriety be made to us: at least, we may take occasion from it,

1. To excite your desires—

[Justly did these Remonstrants, who themselves "had searched the land," declare it to be a good, "an exceeding good land." And are there not those amongst us, who by faith have have searched the heavenly land, and already tasted its delicious fruits? Is not the sealing influence of the Spirit said to be "the *earnest* of our inheritance[l]?" And may we not from the *first-fruits* of the Spirit which we have already received[m], judge in a measure what the harvest shall be? May we not at least take upon us to affirm that heaven is a good, an exceeding good land? Yes, truly, "it flows with milk and honey;" yet while it affords abundance to all, it gives satiety to none — — — How can that land be otherwise than good, which was prepared by God the Father from the foundation of the world, purchased for us on the cross by the blood of his dear Son, and secured to us by the

[k] Compare ch. xiii. 30. with the text.
[l] Eph. i. 13, 14. [m] Rom. viii. 23.

the gift of the Holy Ghost, whose office it is to fit us for it, and to preserve us to it[o]? ——— How can that be otherwise than good, which is emphatically called "Emmanuel's land[p]," as being the place where our adorable Saviour displays the full radiance of his glory, and communicates to every one, according to the measure of his capacity, all the fulness of his richest blessings? ——— In whatever view we contemplate it, we cannot but see, that it is worthy of our utmost exertions, and will amply repay all that we can do, or suffer, in the attainment of it.]

2. To animate your hopes—

[Unbelief will say to us exactly what the people said to each other on this occasion; "Were it not better for us to return to Egypt? Let us make a captain, and let us return to Egypt." "When we were in the world, we enjoyed its pleasures, which now we have exchanged for pain and trouble. When we turned our backs upon the world, we imagined that we should experience nothing but ease and happiness under the protection of our God; but, behold, here are constant difficulties and trials to be encountered, and such too as we can never surmount: it were better therefore to return to our former state, and to leave events to God, who is too merciful to exclude any of his creatures from his heavenly kingdom." But, Beloved, why should any of you be discouraged by your trials and conflicts? Have you not ONE on your side, who is able to make you "more than conquerors over all your enemies?" "If God be for you, who can be against you[q]." Multiply the number and power of your enemies a thousand-fold, and you need not fear them. Only, "Be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might[r]:" and know, that, though you are but as a worm, you shall, through his almighty aid, be enabled to "thresh the mountains[s]" ——— ]

3. To direct your exertions—

[One caution did Joshua and Caleb give to Israel; which also we would recommend to your attention; it is, to *guard against an unbelieving and disobedient spirit*: "Only rebel not ye against the Lord." You have nothing to fear but sin. Nothing, but sin, can by any means hurt you. As for men and devils, so far from prevailing against you, they are only "bread for you," and shall, by the very efforts which they use to destroy you, be made subservient to your spiritual welfare. But sin is a deadly evil: *that* will provoke your God to depart from you: *that* may cause him to "swear in his wrath, that you shall never enter into his rest[t]." O put away from you that deadly evil! Especially put away unbelief: it is "by an evil heart of unbelief that you will be tempted to depart from the Living God." Pray therefore to God to "increase your faith[x]." Guard also against a murmuring

[o] 2 Tim. iv. 18.
[p] Isai. viii. 8.
[q] Rom. viii. 31, 37.
[r] Eph. vi. 10.
[s] Isai. xli. 14, 15.
[t] Heb. iii. 11.
[u] ib. ver. 12.
[x] Luke xvii. 5.

muring spirit. If the Lord bring you into difficulties, it is only for the magnifying of his own grace in your deliverance. It is not your place to be indulging solicitude about events. God "would have you without carefulness[y]:" he bids you "be careful for nothing;" but to "cast all your care on him." Duty is yours: events are his. "Only therefore let your conversation be as it becometh the Gospel of Christ[z];" and your success is sure: for your God has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."]

[y] 1 Cor. vii. 32. Phil. iv. 6. 1 Pet. v. 7. [z] Phil. i. 27.

## CVII.

### GOD'S ANSWER TO THE INTERCESSION OF MOSES.

Numb. xiv. 20, 21. *And the Lord said, I have pardoned, according to thy word: but, as truly as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord.*

LITTLE do the world think how much they are indebted to the saints.[a] They are the cluster for the sake of which the vineyard of the Lord is spared[a]; the elect, for whose sake the days of vengeance have been often shortened[b]; the little remnant, without which the whole world would long since have been made as Sodom and Gomorrah[c]. In the passage before us we have this very matter exhibited in a striking point of view. The whole people of Israel were in a state of rebellion against God; and God was meditating their utter extermination. But Moses lifts up his heart in prayer for them; and, by his importunate intercession, averts the judgments which were ready to burst upon them.

Let us consider,

I. The prayer he offered—

This did not relate to the eternal salvation of the people, except incidentally and by remote consequence: it had respect only to the threatening which God had denounced against the people. Having reason to fear that God would "smite them all with a pestilence, and disinherit them" utterly[d], Moses intreated God to spare them, and urged such arguments as he judged most suitable to the occasion.

[a] Isai. lxv. 8. [b] Matt. xxiv. 23. [c] Isai. i. 9. [d] ver. 11, 12.

sion. These pleas of his deserve an attentive consideration.

He pressed upon the Deity,

1. A regard for his own honour—

["What will the Egyptians and the Canaanites say? Will they not ascribe the destruction of this people to a want of power in thee to accomplish thy projected plans[e]? O let them not have such cause for triumph! let them not have so specious an occasion to blaspheme thy name!"

This was an argument of great weight. He had used it successfully on a former occasion[f]; and God himself had acknowledged its force[g]. This therefore is a plea which we should use: we should use it with God, as an inducement to him to keep us[h] — — — and we should use it with ourselves, as an incentive to vigilance and circumspection[i]. We should be exceeding tender of God's honour: and, when tempted to the commission of any sin, we should think, How will the Philistines rejoice, and the uncircumcised triumph[k]! how will they "blaspheme that sacred name by which I am called[l]!" O that I may "never thus give occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully[m]!"]

2. A conformity to his own perfections—

[Didst thou not, O my God, when proclaiming thy name to me, represent thyself as "long-suffering, and of great mercy, and as forgiving iniquity and transgression, though thou wouldest not clear the guilty[n]?" Let it now be seen that this is indeed thy character. I do not ask that thou shouldest "leave them altogether unpunished; but only that thou shouldest not make a full end of them[o], as thou hast threatened."

Here, methinks, is a plea, which, almost above all others, it becomes us to urge in all our supplications at the throne of grace. The character of God, as a God of infinite mercy, is that which encourages our addresses to him. When every other ground of hope fails, this is still firm. If only we do not "limit the Holy One of Israel," we can never be at a loss for "arguments with which to fill our mouths" at a throne of grace. O let

[e] ver. 13—16. [f] Exod. xxxii. 12.
[g] Deut. xxxii. 26, 27. See also Ezek. xx. 9, 14, 22, 44.
[h] Ps. v. 8. Jer. xiv. 21. [i] 1 Tim. vi. 1. [k] 2 Sam. i. 20.
[l] Jam. ii. 7. [m] 1 Tim. v. 14.
[n] ver. 17, 18. which refers to Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7.
[o] That clause, "by no means clearing the guilty," may, both in Exod. xxxiv. 7. and in this place, be rendered "clearing, I will not clear," i. e. not make desolate. The word "*guilty*" is not in the original. In that sense it will be exactly parallel with Jer. xxx. 11. But the sense affixed to it in the translation is probably the right, though the other is better suited to the purpose for which it is here adduced.

O let us study well the representations which God has given of himself, and especially that to which Moses referred: then, even in our lowest state of guilt or misery, we shall never despair of obtaining mercy at his hands.]

3. A consistency with his own conduct—

["Thou has forgiven this people from Egypt even until now: and wilt thou abandon them at last? O let it not be so: pardon, I beseech thee, yet again and again their iniquity, according unto the greatness of thine unbounded mercy[p]."

This plea, if used with men, would have had no weight: it would have operated rather to prevent the repetition of mercies which had been so abused. But, with God, it availeth much: and in our minds too it is a most encouraging consideration. We may look back and see how God has borne with all our frowardness from our youth up to the present moment; and may take occasion from his past forbearance to supplicate the continuance of it: "Remember, O Lord, thy tender mercies, and thy loving kindnesses; for they have been ever of old[q]." Yes; we should "account the long-suffering of God to be salvation[r]," and the goodness he has already exercised towards us as a motive and encouragement to repentance[s].]

Such was the prayer of Moses, a prayer peculiarly excellent, because it was a holy *pleading* with God. Let us now proceed to consider,

II. The answer he obtained—

"I have pardoned," saith God, "*according to thy word.* Thou hast intreated me to spare them; and I will spare them: but, I swear by my own life, that the whole of my conduct on this occasion shall be such, as shall procure me honour to the remotest ends of the earth, and to the latest period of time. Every one of my perfections shall be now displayed: now will I exhibit before my people such rays of my glory, as shall illumine the benighted heathen, and fill the whole earth with wonder."

Now then, my Brethren, let us contemplate this subject with holy awe: let us beg of God to take away the veil from our hearts, that we may see wherein this glory of his consists. Let us behold,

1. His condescension in hearing prayer—

[Here was a whole nation involved in actual rebellion against God: and one single individual betakes himself to prayer. What,

[p] ver. 19. [q] Ps. xxv. 6. [r] 2 Pet. iii. 15. [s] Rom. ii. 4.

What, it may be said, can a single individual do? Read the answer of God, and see. He replies, not, "I *will* pardon," but, "I *have* pardoned:" "the very moment thou liftedst up thy voice, my hands were tied, and I could no longer persist in my resolution to destroy them[t]. I have pardoned *according to thy word*, and to the full extent of thy petitions." Oh, who after this will ever doubt the efficacy of prayer? If God answered so speedily the prayer of one on behalf of a rebellious nation, what will he not do for those who supplicate mercy for themselves? Will he ever cast out *their* prayer? No: let the whole universe know, that he is "a God that heareth prayer," and that not even the vilest of the human race shall "ever seek his face in vain."]

2. His mercy in forbearing vengeance—

[Consider the mercies which that nation had experienced, and the extent of that wickedness which they now committed; consider that they cast the most bitter reflections on God himself, and actually appointed a captain to lead them back to Egypt[u], and were proceeding to murder those who exhorted them to obedience: could it be supposed that *such* persons should be spared, spared too after God had said he would instantly cut them off? Whom then will he not spare? Who, whilst on praying-ground, can be considered as beyond the reach of mercy? Let us not despair of any; nor let any despair of themselves: He is the same God as ever; "slow to anger, and of great kindness, and ready to repent him of the evil" which he has thought to inflict upon us, the very moment that he can do it in consistency with his own perfections.]

3. His justice in punishing sin—

[Though he forbore to destroy the nation at large, he executed immediate vengeance on those who were the leaders and instigators of the rebellion[x]. Nor were the people themselves left unpunished. They had expressed a wish that they had died in the wilderness: now God gave them their wish; and declared that not one of those who had rebelled against him should ever see the promised land. Forty *days* had been spent in searching the land of Canaan; and forty *years* were they condemned to bear their iniquities, till their carcases should be consumed in the wilderness.

What an awful lesson does this give to the ungodly world! Who must not tremble for fear of his judgments? Who does not see that it is vain to hope for impunity on account of the number of those who tread the paths of wickedness? The question is often confidently put by sinners, Do you think that God will condemn so many? We answer, If you would know what God will do, look at what he has done: inquire, how many of those who

[t] Compare Dan. ix. 20, 21, 23. [u] Neh. ix. 17. [x] ver. 36, 37.

who came out of Egypt ever were admitted into the land of Canaan: and when you have learned that, you will know how God will proceed in the day of judgment[y]. Let all the world hear this, and tremble: for "verily there is a God that judgeth in the earth."]

4. His goodness in rewarding virtue—

[Two of the spies were faithful to their God: and behold how God interposed for them! The congregation was just going to stone them, and God instantly displayed his glory in such a manner as to appal the hearts of their enemies. To them also he bore testimony, that they had "followed him fully:" and he promised them, that though every other man throughout all the tribes should die in the wilderness, *they* should go into the promised land, and enjoy the inheritance reserved for them[z].

Do any of the human race wish to ascertain whether their works shall be rewarded? Let them look to this history: let them here see how God will protect his people; and how assuredly they who serve him in time, shall dwell with him in *eternity*. Surely none who hear these records will ever be afraid of being singular, or of bearing persecution for righteousness sake. No: from henceforth every soul should be emboldened to "confess Christ before men," and to "cleave unto him with full purpose of heart."]

5. His faithfulness in fulfilling his word—

[Here was a strong temptation to rescind his promises: and indeed, because of the appearance of so doing, God says, "Ye shall know my breach of promise[a]." But the promise was not made to that people, that *they at all events* should inherit the land of Canaan: it was made to Abraham, that *his seed* should inherit it: and, both on this and a former occasion, when God threatened to destroy the present generation, he offered to raise up a nation from the loins of Moses, and to give the promised land *to them*[b].

God fulfilled his word in every point: and Joshua appealed to the whole nation of Israel for the truth of this[c]; as did Solomon many hundred years after him[d]. None therefore need to be afraid of trusting in God: for "he is not a man that he should lie, or the son of man that he should repent[e]." Let the whole world be assured, that they may safely rely on him; that "not one jot or tittle of his word shall ever fail;" that "faithful is He who hath promised;" and that "what he hath promised he is able also to perform." Be it known therefore, I say, "that they who trust in him shall not be ashamed or confounded world without end[f]."]

6. His

[y] See 1 Cor. x. 11. Heb. iii. 17—19. & iv. 1. Jude v.
[z] ver. 24, 30. [a] ver. 34. [b] ver. 12. with Exod. xxxii. 10.
[c] Josh. xxiii. 14. [d] 1 Kin. viii. 56.
[e] Numb. xxiii. 19. [f] Isai. xlv. 17.

6. His power to accomplish his own sovereign will and pleasure—

[The people had expressed their fears that their little ones would fall a prey to the warlike inhabitants of Canaan. Now, says God, "those very children, who ye said would be a prey, even them will I bring in, and they shall know the land which ye have despised[g]." Weak as ye judge them to be, I will give them the victory; and not an enemy shall be able to stand before them.

Hear this, ye drooping, doubting Christians! let the whole world hear it: yea, let it never be forgotten, that "God ordaineth strength in babes and sucklings;" that "his strength is perfected in their weakness;" and that through him the weakest of us shall be "more than conquerors." Who weaker than Paul in his own apprehension? "I have not," says he, "a sufficiency even to think a good thought:" yet who stronger in reality? "I can do all things," saith he, "through Christ who strengtheneth me[h]." Let the weak then say, "I am strong[i]:" "let the feeble be as David, and the house of David be as the angel of the Lord[k]."]

APPLICATION—

[Behold now this glory of the Lord! see how it shines throughout this mysterious dispensation! see his condescension in hearing prayer—his mercy in forbearing vengeance—his justice in punishing sin—his goodness in rewarding virtue—his faithfulness in fulfilling his word—and his power to execute his sovereign will and pleasure! Let the whole earth contemplate it: let all transmit the knowledge of it to those around them; and assist in spreading it to the remotest heathen: let all expect the time when this view of God shall be universal through the world, and all shall give him the glory of his immutable perfections.

And, whilst we view the glory of God in his past works, let us *remember what will be the final issue of all his dispensations.* His glory will hereafter shine in still brighter splendor. When his answers to the prayers of all his people shall be known, how marvellous will his *condescension* and grace appear! When the sins of the whole world shall be made manifest, how shall we be filled with wonder at his long-suffering and *forbearance!* How tremendous will his *justice* and severity be found, when millions of impenitent sinners are cast headlong into the bottomless abyss! And when his obedient people shall be exalted to thrones of glory, how will his *goodness* and mercy be admired and adored! Then also will his truth and *faithfulness* be seen in the exact completion of every promise he has ever given; and his *power* and might be gratefully acknowledged by *all* whom he has redeemed, sanctified, and saved.

This then is certain, that in every human being he will be glorified. But the question is, How will he be glorified in *me?* will

[g] ver. 31. [h] Phil. iv. 13. [i] Joel iii. 10. [k] Zech. xii. 8.

will it be in my salvation or condemnation? In answering this question aright we are all deeply interested: nor will it be difficult to answer it, provided we inquire what our real character is. Do we resemble the unbelieving and rebellious Israelites, or those believing spies who "followed the Lord fully?" Vast was the difference between them, and consequently the discrimination will be easy. The Lord grant that we may "so judge ourselves now, that we may not be judged of the Lord" in that awful day!]

## CVIII.

### FOLLOWING THE LORD FULLY.

Numb. xiv. 24. *But my servant Caleb, because he had another spirit with him, and hath followed me fully, him will I bring into the land whereinto he went; and his seed shall possess it.*

THE fewness of those who shall finally be saved is strongly declared in the holy Scriptures; yet they who venture to suggest such an idea, are deemed uncharitable in the extreme. But it is not owing to a want of mercy in God that any perish: it is utterly their own fault: God delights to bless his faithful and obedient people; but the unbelieving and disobedient he will eternally condemn. The numbers that are found in either of these classes make no difference with respect to him: if there were only one or two ungodly, they alone should perish, and all others should be saved: but if a whole nation be ungodly, and only one or two of them be observant of the divine commands, those individuals alone shall find acceptance with him, and all the rest shall meet with their deserved doom. None but Noah and his family escaped the deluge: none but Lot and his daughters were delivered from the judgments which came upon Sodom and Gomorrah: thus, in the passage before us, we are told that Caleb alone, together with Joshua, was permitted to enter into the promised land, because they alone had followed the Lord fully.

To elucidate this record, and to bring it home to our own hearts, we shall shew,

I. When

I. When we may be said to follow the Lord fully—

The whole nation of Israel might be considered as followers of the Lord, because they had given up themselves to him as his redeemed people, and depended on him for guidance and protection. In the same manner the whole body of Christians may be called followers of Christ, because they profess to have been redeemed by him from the far sorer bondage of sin and death, and because they look to him, in profession at least, to guide them by his Spirit, to keep them by his grace, and to bring them in safety to the heavenly Canaan. But as the great body of the Jewish nation deceived themselves to their ruin, so, it is to be feared, the greater part of the Christian world will ultimately be disappointed of their hopes. To follow the Lord will be to but little purpose, unless we follow him *fully*. Now this implies, that we follow him,

1. With unreserved cheerfulness—

[The Israelites at large were pleased with God's service no longer than while their inclinations were gratified to the full. As soon as ever they were called to exercise any self-denial, or to suffer a little for his sake, they began to murmur, and repented that they had taken his yoke upon them. Especially when they heard the report of the spies respecting the power of their enemies, they proposed to cast off God's yoke altogether, and to return to their former masters in Egypt. But Caleb "had another spirit with him:" he considered himself as altogether at God's disposal, and cheerfully obeyed him, as well in circumstances of difficulty and danger, as in the ways that were more pleasing to flesh and blood.

Now this disposition characterizes every faithful follower of Christ. It is not for us to choose our own way, but to follow the directions of our divine Master. No commandment of his must be esteemed grievous; nothing must be called "a hard saying;" but we must cheerfully conform ourselves to every part of his revealed will, and account his service to be perfect freedom.]

2. With undaunted resolution—

[Caleb had seen with his own eyes what difficulties he should have to encounter in subduing the land of Canaan; yet was he not in the least dismayed: yea, his whole nation were so offended with his fidelity to God, that they gave orders that he should be stoned to death. But nothing could intimidate him: he knew the will of God, and he was determined to execute it at all events.

Thus

Thus the Christian whose heart is right with God, is not deterred by any difficulties from proceeding in the path of duty: he knows that the world will be against him; and he often finds his greatest enemies to be those of his own household: yet he determines to go forward, and to obey God rather than man. Like the Hebrew youths, if he behold a furnace prepared for his destruction, he will still hold fast his integrity, and submit to death itself rather than violate his duty to his God.]

3. With unshaken affiance—

[The report of the spies was doubtless very discouraging. The people whom they had seen were of most gigantic stature: the cities in which they dwelt, were walled up to heaven: and it is probable that there was a dreadful pestilence at that time ravaging "the land, and swallowing up the inhabitants thereof." But Caleb had the promise of Jehovah to rest upon; and therefore he knew that he could not fail of success; yea, he was assured that, however numerous or mighty his enemies were, they should be "bread for the Lord's people," and be as easily crushed and devoured by them as a piece of bread.

In this also the faithful follower of Christ will resemble Caleb: he knows that Omnipotence is engaged in his behalf; and he rests securely on the word of God. If his corruptions were yet stronger than they are, and the world, with the confederate hosts of hell, were tenfold more powerful, he would not fear; "he knows in whom he has believed," and is persuaded that "He who has promised is able also to perform."]

The character of those who follow the Lord fully, being thus delineated, we shall proceed to notice,

II. The blessedness of those who do so—

Here also the history of Caleb will serve as our guide. The text informs us, that he received,

1. The approbation of his God—

[God confessed him before all Israel as "*his servant.*" What an honour was this, to be thus distinguished by Jehovah himself! And shall not every faithful servant of Jehovah be thus distinguished? Shall he not have an inward witness of the Spirit testifying of his adoption into God's family, and enabling him with confidence to cry, Abba, Father? Will not God "shed abroad his love in the hearts" of his people, and "seal them with the Holy Spirit of promise, as the earnest of their eternal inheritance?" And though no authentic declaration shall be made to others respecting his state, yet shall his very enemies be constrained to reverence him in their hearts, even though, like Herod, they should persecute him unto death.]

2. The completion of all his wishes—

[Doubtless Caleb earnestly desired an inheritance in the land

land of Canaan: and the very mountain on which his feet had trodden was assigned to him as his portion by God's express appointment. But he surely looked beyond an earthly inheritance: nor can we doubt but that he is distinguished in the Canaan above as much as he was in the earthly Canaan.

And what does the faithful Christian desire? What is the great object of his ambition, but to inherit that good land which the Lord his God has promised him? And shall he come short of it? Will not God preserve him unto his heavenly kingdom? Yes: neither men nor devils shall deprive him of his inheritance: that very land, which by faith he has so often viewed and trodden, shall be given to him; and "all the seed of Caleb" and of Abraham shall have it for their everlasting portion. Behold, Christian, where Caleb now is, thou shalt shortly be: whatever difficulties may obstruct thy way, or whatever length of time may intervene, the period shall arrive, when He whom thou servest shall say unto thee, "Come thou blessed of my Father, receive the kingdom prepared for thee from the foundation of the world."]

ADDRESS,

1. Those who have never set themselves to follow the Lord at all—

[Think not that the Christian name will avail thee, while thou art destitute of the Christian spirit. Nor imagine that thou wilt be screened from divine vengeance by the number of those who are in thy condition: for there were but two out of all who had grown to man's estate, that were suffered to enter into the promised land: all the rest were excluded from it, that they might be an example unto us, and might shew us what we are to expect, if we give not up ourselves to the service of Christ. Let me then intreat you all to become followers of Christ, "not in word only, but in deed and in truth." Look to him, that you may experience the full benefits of his redemption. Trust in his blood to cleanse you from your sins: rely on his Spirit to guide you in his ways: and depend on his grace to subdue all your enemies before you. But if you still persist in your rebellion against him, know for a certainty that you shall never see that good land which you profess to expect as your eternal inheritance.]

2. Those who follow the Lord partially—

[A profession of religion may in a variety of ways conduce to the good of society, but it will never save the soul. We must follow the Lord *fully*, if we would find favour with him in the eternal world. It is no small matter to be Christians indeed. What Caleb was under the Law, we must be under the Gospel. The reason of Caleb's acceptance is marked repeatedly, in the strongest

strongest terms[a]. The reason too of the rejection of the others is marked in similar language, and with equal plainness[b]. And the example of those who perished is set before us by St. Jude, on purpose that the professors of godliness may be admonished by it[c]. O let the admonition sink deep into our hearts! and let us all be stirred up to diligence, that we may be found "Israelites indeed in whom there is no guile!"]

3. Those who, like Caleb, are following the Lord fully—

[Fear not singularity in so good a cause. If you are singular in following the Lord fully, the fault is not yours, but theirs who presume to violate the divine commands. Go on then, though the whole universe should be against you. If God acknowledge you as his servants, you need not regard the censures or the threats of men. You are embarked in a good cause: you serve a good master: you run for a good prize. The land of promise is before you. Press forward for the attainment of it: "Be faithful unto death, and God will give you a crown of life."].

[a] Josh. xiv. 8, 9, 14. [b] Numb. xxxii. 10, 11. [c] Jude 5.

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## CIX.

### PRESUMPTION OF THE REBELLIOUS ISRAELITES.

Numb. xiv. 44. *But they presumed to go up unto the hill-top.*

THERE are principles in the human heart of which few people are aware. One in particular is, a disposition to withstand the authority of God, whatever his commands may be. We see something of this in children towards their parents: the very circumstance of a thing being enjoined makes them averse to it; and a prohibition immediately creates in them a desire after the thing prohibited. St. Paul represents this to have been his experience in his unconverted state: "Sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in him all manner of concupiscence," and made him rise against the commandment, as water does against the dam that obstructs its progress. Such a disposition is not uncommon. There is scarcely any man, who, if he will examine carefully his own conduct, may not find, that he more readily does or forbears any thing in compliance

pliance with his own will, than when that thing is the subject of a prohibition or command. This perverse temper was very conspicuous in the Israelites when on the borders of Canaan. Being commanded, importuned, and encouraged to go up and possess the promised land, they could not be prevailed upon to go; but, when they were commanded to return into the wilderness, immediately they changed their minds, and would go against the Canaanites, even in direct opposition to the will of God. This is called in our text, "*presumption*:" "they presumed to go up unto the hill-top."

Let us, for the elucidation of this subject, inquire,

I. Wherein their presumption consisted—

To believe the promises of God, and to expect the accomplishment of them to our own souls, is considered by many as an evidence of presumption. But presumption is rather the fruit of unbelief. That of which the Israelites were guilty consisted in two things;

1. They went up without the divine presence—

[God had told them that he would not go up with them: but they, who had just before despaired of success, even though God himself should fight on their side, now thought they could succeed by the unassisted efforts of their own arm. The folly of such a conceit we easily discern; but are little aware how universally it obtains in reference to spiritual combats. God offers to be with us, and by his almighty power to give us the victory. We persuade ourselves that we have a sufficiency of strength within ourselves, and that we can succeed without any supernatural assistance. Hence we neglect to implore help from God, we refuse to trust in him, and we go forth against our enemies in our own strength — — —

What is this but the very conduct of those rebellious Israelites? The only difference is, that they acted thus in reference to temporal enemies, and an earthly inheritance; whereas we do it, whilst we have all the powers of darkness to contend with, and no less a prize than heaven itself at stake.]

2. They went up in opposition to the divine command—

[God had expressly said to them, "Go not up:" and yet they would persist in their resolution. They would not go when they were commanded; but now will go, when they are forbidden.

forbidden. Doubtless they would attempt to vindicate their conduct, by alleging, that the rectifying of their former errors was the best proof of their repentance: and they would persuade themselves that God could never be angry with them for doing that, which he had just punished them for refusing to do. But vain were all such reasonings as these. Their duty was to obey, and not to put their reasonings in opposition to the divine commands. Yet in this we imitate them continually. We find, as we imagine, good reasons why this or that command is not to be obeyed; and then we follow our own will, in direct opposition to God's ———— But what presumption is this! We do not like the way which God has prescribed for us to walk in, and we will go to heaven in our own way. This conduct we may attempt to justify; but God has stamped upon it its true character, as daring and impious presumption.]

To form a just estimate of their conduct, let us consider,

II. Wherein it issued—

They hoped, no doubt, that they should gain the victory: but their efforts terminated,

1. In painful disappointment—

[They found their enemies, as Moses had foretold, prepared for the encounter: and no sooner did they make the attack, than their courage failed them, and they fled; yea their enemies chased them "like enraged bees," and destroyed them even unto Hormah. This is precisely what they had reason to expect; and what must be expected by all who will presumptuously advance in their own strength. In fact, this is the very thing of which all who depend on their own arm complain. They will not go forward in dependence on the Lord, and in obedience to his commands; but will trust in their own fancied sufficiency to work out their salvation: the consequence is, that, after all their endeavours to mortify sin, and to lead a heavenly life, they cannot do the things which are required of them ———— Hence the general complaint, that they who preach the Gospel require of men more than they can perform. But in whom is the fault? Not in those who enforce plainly the commands of God, but in those who, rejecting the offers of God's all-sufficient grace, attempt to gain the victory by an arm of flesh.]

2. In fruitless sorrow—

[The fugitive hosts "returned and wept before the Lord: but the Lord would not hearken to their voice, nor give ear unto them[a]." Now they regretted their former disobedience, and prayed that the sentence denounced against them might be reversed. If God would but try them once more, they would do whatsoever he

[a] Deut. i. 45.

he should command. But their doom was sealed: yea, in this very defeat, it had already been begun to be executed. Many were slain; and God had decreed that every one of them, except Caleb and Joshua, should die in the wilderness. Like Esau therefore, "they found no place of repentance, though they sought it carefully with tears[b]."

What an affecting representation is this of the final issue of disobedience to the world at large! When once their doom is sealed, how bitterly will they regret their past folly and wickedness! O, if they could but have another opportunity afforded them, how gladly would they embrace it! how resolutely would they obey the voice of God! they would no more presumptuously prefer their own will and way to his, but would obey him cheerfully and without reserve. But in vain are all such desires: their sentence is irrevocably passed: and all possibility of attaining the heavenly inheritance is gone for ever. Nothing now remains for them but to "weep and wail and gnash their teeth" for anguish, and to die that death, that second death, which they were not careful to avoid.]

The subject will give me a fit occasion to address,

1. Those who are afraid of presumption—

[Many there are who dread presumption, and who, through a fear of it, are deterred from applying to themselves the rich consolations of the Gospel: they think it would be presumptuous in such weak and sinful creatures as them to expect all the great things which God has promised to his people ——— But, be it known unto you that it is no presumption to believe in God, or trust in God, even though you were the weakest and the vilest of the human race. If indeed you were to profess a confidence in him, whilst you were living in wilful and allowed sin, that would be presumption: but, if you truly desire to devote yourselves to God, and to be saved by him in his appointed way, the deeper sense you have of your own unworthiness, the more assuredly shall you receive from him all the blessings of a complete salvation ———]

2. Those who indulge presumption—

[Of those who determinately go on in their own way, we have already spoken; and therefore we shall pass them over with only intreating them to remember what they have already heard to be the issue of such conduct. But there are even amongst those who profess religion, many who are guilty of very great presumption. What is it but presumption, to run into needless temptations, in hopes that God will keep us? O that the worldly-minded would consider this, when they are grasping after preferment or gain! O that *they* would consider it, who mix so readily with carnal company, and conform so easily to the maxims and habits of a vain world! O that the impure and sensual would consider

[b] Heb. xii. 17.

sider it, when they give such liberty to their eyes and tongue! Beloved Brethren, we must not tempt God: but, retaining a sense of our extreme weakness and sinfulness, we must watch and pray that we enter not into temptation. Let this then be our daily prayer, "Keep thy servant, O Lord, from presumptuous sins, lest they get dominion over me!" and "Preserve me blameless unto thy heavenly kingdom!" "Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe."]

## CX.

### THE SABBATH-BREAKER STONED.

Numb. xv. 32—36. *And while the children of Israel were in the wilderness, they found a man that gathered sticks upon the sabbath-day. And they that found him gathering sticks brought him unto Moses and Aaron, and unto all the congregation: and they put him in ward, because it was not declared what should be done to him. And the Lord said unto Moses, The man shall be surely put to death: all the congregation shall stone him with stones without the camp. And all the congregation brought him without the camp, and stoned him with stones, that he died; as the Lord commanded Moses.*

IN great communities, instances of flagrant transgression will occur; nor can any mercies or judgments from God prevent them. Nothing but divine grace can keep individuals in the path of duty. The presumption of those, who, in opposition to the divine command, had gone up to the hill-top to engage the Canaanites, had been severely punished: and though God had since given instructions respecting the particular offerings which should at a future period be presented for sins of ignorance, he had expressly declared, that presumptuous sins should be punished with death[s]; and that no offering whatever should be accepted for them[a]. Yet, behold, scarcely had this delaration been given, before a man was found profaning the sabbath-day: for which offence he was made a signal monument of divine vengeance.

His crime and punishment, which are specified in the text, lead us to notice the guilt and danger of profaning the sabbath. Let us consider,

I. The

[s] ver. 30, 31.

I. The guilt—

According to the estimate of mankind in general, the profanation of the sabbath is but a slight offence: but, in fact, it a very heinous sin. It is,

1. An unreasonable sin—

[Consider who it is that requires the observation of the sabbath. It is that God who made us, and endowed us with all our faculties, and upholds us every moment, maintaining our souls in life, and providing every thing for our support and comfort. And is this the Being to whom we grudge that small portion of time which he requires? But further, this gracious God has so loved us as to give his only-begotten Son to die for us — — — — and shall we think it hard to consecrate one day in the week to *him*?

Consider next, what portion of our time it is that he requires. If it had pleased him, he might have given us one day for our bodily concerns, and reserved six for himself: and whatever difficulties such an arrangement had occasioned, it would have been our duty cheerfully to obey his will. But the reverse of this is the proportion that he requires; "Six days," says he, "shalt thou labour; and the seventh day shalt thou keep holy." What base ingratitude then is it to grudge him such a portion of our time as this!

But consider further, for whose sake it is that he requires it. He wants it not for himself: he is not benefited by it: he enjoined the observance of the sabbath purely for our sakes: he knew that without some appointment for periodical returns of sacred rest, we should soon become so immersed in worldly cares, as utterly to forget our eternal interests; and therefore he fixed such a portion of our time as to his unerring wisdom appeared best, in order that we might be compelled to seek our own truest happiness. This is what he himself tells us; "The sabbath was made for man[b]." Shall we then, for whose benefit that day was set apart, refuse to consecrate it to the Lord, according to his appointment?

Let but these considerations be weighed, and it will appear a most unreasonable thing to trespass upon that time for temporal pursuits, which God has so mercifully set apart for the concerns of our souls.]

2. A presumptuous sin—

[It is particularly in this view that the context leads us to consider it. God had enjoined the observance of the sabbath in an audible voice from Mount Sinai[c]; and had afterwards repeatedly commanded that every person who should profane that day by any kind of earthly employment, even the baking of his food,

[b] Mark ii. 27. [c] Exod. xx. 8—11.

food, or the lighting of a fire, should be cut off from among his people[d]. Now it was in direct opposition to all these commands that the man of whom we are speaking presumed to gather sticks. He might be ready to excuse himself perhaps by saying, that this was but a small breach of the sabbath, and the sticks were necessary for his comfort: but these were no excuses: his conduct was a decided act of rebellion against God; and it is manifest that both Moses and God himself regarded it in that light: it was therefore a presumptuous sin, and consequently, as the Scripture expresses it, "*a reproaching of God himself*" as a hard master that was unfit to be obeyed[e].

Such is every violation of the sabbath amongst us. We know we are not ignorant of his commands respecting that holy day; and what we do, we do in direct opposition to his will: we "reproach him" for exacting of us what he had no right to demand, and we are under no obligation to grant. Let the profaners of the sabbath regard their conduct in this view, and they will need nothing further to convince them of their guilt.]

Having noticed the guilt of profaning the sabbath, let us consider,

II. The danger—

[Wherein can this be painted more strongly than in the text? The very sight of this sinful act created instant and universal alarm: and, as Moses did not know in what way it was to be punished, he sought instructions from God himself. Behold now the answer of Almighty God; of him, whose wisdom is unerring, whose justice is most pure, whose mercy is infinite: his answer is, "The man shall surely be put to death: all the congregation shall stone him with stones that he die:" and let this be done "without the camp," that he may be marked as an accursed sinner, that is separated from me, and shall have no part with my people.

Had the offender been cautioned respecting the consequences of such an act, it is probable that he would have laughed at the idea, or, as the Scripture expresses it, would have "puffed at it." So it is with men at this day: they will not be convinced that there is any danger in what they are pleased to call light sins: but there is a day coming when they will find to their cost, that no sin is light, and least of all is *presumptuous* sin to be so accounted.

If any thing more were needful to evince the danger of violating the sabbath, we might mention, that this sin is particularly specified, as a very principal occasion of bringing down all those judgments, with which the Jews were visited at the time of

[d] Exod. xxxi. 14, 15. & xxxv. 2, 3. See also Ex. xvi. 23, 29.
[e] ver. 30, 31.

of their captivity in Babylon. Nehemiah, after the return of the Jews from Babylon, found, that the sabbath was still shamefully profaned amongst them. To remedy this evil, he exerted all his authority, and expostulated with them in the most energetic manner: "Then I contended with the nobles of Judah, and said unto them, What evil thing is this that ye do, and profane the sabbath-day? Did not your fathers thus, and did not our God bring all this evil upon us and upon our city? Yet ye bring more wrath upon Israel by profaning the sabbath[f]."

Surely then, if such was the issue to the individual that led the way, and such the consequence to the whole nation, when it had followed the example, it will be madness in us to make light of this offence. We may, it is true, escape the judgments of God in this world; (though it is surprising how often they overtake the profaners of the sabbath;) but we shall certainly not escape them in the world to come.]

Let me then propose this subject to you as an occasion,

1. For deep humiliation—

[We are apt to think highly of our nation in comparison of the Jewish people: but, if we compare ourselves with them at the period when the events mentioned in our text occurred, we shall see no great reason to boast. Among the Jews there was found but one person in the whole nation that dared to profane the sabbath: amongst us there is scarcely one in a hundred that does not profane it. Amongst them it was profaned only by gathering a few sticks: amongst us, in every way that can be conceived: it is a day of business or of pleasure to all ranks and orders of men[g] — — — Amongst them, this solitary instance created universal indignation: the spectators instantly communicated the matter to the magistrates, and the magistrates instantly set themselves to stop the evil. But amongst us, with the exception of a few who sigh and mourn in secret, scarcely any regard the evil as of any consequence: the very name of an Informer is deemed odious, so that no one chooses to incur the obloquy attached to it; and, if any were zealous and courageous enough to inform, there are but few magistrates who would not shrink back from the task of exercising the power with which they are armed. Such is the state of this nation; such the state of almost every town and village in it. Who then can wonder that we are visited with the divine judgments? Who does not see that this national evil calls for national humiliation?

But let us bring home the matter personally to ourselves. How many sabbaths have we enjoyed, and yet how few have we kept in the way that God has required! A person that has attained to seventy years of age, has had no less than *ten years of*

[f] Neh. xiii. 17, 18. [g] Shops open, &c. &c.

*of sabbaths*. What a time is this for securing the interests of the soul! And what a load of guilt has been contracted in all that time, merely from the one single offence of profaning the sabbath-day! Brethren, we need indeed to lie low before God in dust and ashes. We have need to be thankful too that God's wrath has not broken forth against us, and cut us off in the midst of our transgressions. Let us know how to estimate the forbearance we have experienced; and let "the goodness of our God lead us to repentance."]

2. For holy vigilance—

[The *ceremonial part* of the sabbath is done away; so that there certainly is a greater latitude allowed to us than was given to the Jews. We acknowledge also that works of necessity and of mercy supersede even those duties which are yet in force on that day. Our Lord himself has taught us to interpret in this view those memorable words of the Prophet, "I will have mercy, and not sacrifice." But the *moral part* is as strongly in force as ever. To have the mind exercised on spiritual subjects, and occupied in advancing the interests of our souls, is our bounden duty. It was the work of the sabbath even in Paradise; and therefore must continue to be our duty still. If it existed two thousand years before the ceremonial law was given, it can never be vacated by the abrogation of that law. Would we know distinctly the duties of the sabbath, the prophet Isaiah has, negatively at least, informed us: "Thou shalt call the sabbath a Delight; thou shalt delight thyself in the Lord, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words[h]." We are to lay aside all the cares and pleasures of the world, and to seek all our happiness in God; and in his immediate service. Even common conversation should as much as possible be put aside, that the mind may be wholly occupied in the service of our God. Now this requires much care and vigilance. The more decent amongst us are ready to think that, if they attend the house of God once or twice, they have done all that is required of them: from a regard to the prejudices of mankind they abstain from some particular amusements; but they are not at all solicitous to make a due improvement of their time. But this by no means comes up to the injunctions of the Prophet; nor will it ever be regarded by God as a just observation of the sabbath. The instructing of our families, the teaching of poor children, the visiting of the sick, and many other exercises of benevolence, may find place on this day: but in a peculiar manner we are called to secret meditation and prayer: we should study the holy Scriptures, and examine our own hearts, and endeavour to keep ourselves in readiness to give up our account to God. Let the consideration of the guilt which we

[h] Isai. lviii. 13, 14.

we contract by spending our sabbaths in another way, put us upon this: and let every sabbath that shall be continued to us be so improved, that it may advance our spiritual state, and help forward our preparation for our eternal rest.]

## CXI.

### THE USE AND INTENT OF FRINGES ON THEIR GARMENTS.

Numb. xv. 37—41. *And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, and bid them that they make them fringes in the borders of their garments, throughout their generations, and that they put upon the fringe of the borders a ribband of blue: and it shall be unto you for a fringe, that ye may look upon it, and remember all the commandments of the Lord, and do them; and that ye seek not after your own heart, and your own eyes, after which ye use to go a whoring: that ye may remember, and do all my commandments, and be holy unto your God. I am the Lord your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt, to be your God: I am the Lord your God.*

A VERY principal distinction between the Christian and Jewish codes is this; that our laws are given in broad, general, comprehensive principles; whereas theirs descended to the most minute particulars, even such as we should have been ready to conceive unworthy the notice of the divine Lawgiver. There was scarcely any occupation in life, respecting which there was not some precise limit fixed, some positive precept enjoined. If they *ploughed*, they must not plough with an ox and an ass. If they *sowed* their ground, they must not sow divers kinds of seeds. If they *reaped*, they must not reap the corners of their field. If they *carried* their corn, they must not go back for a sheaf that they have left behind. If they *threshed* it, they must not muzzle the ox that trod it out. If they *killed* their meat, they must pour the blood upon the ground. If they *dressed* it, they must not seethe a kid in its mother's milk. If they *eat* it, they must not eat the fat. If they *planted* a tree, they must not

eat

eat of the fruit for four years. If they *built a house*, they must make battlements to its roof. So, if they *made a garment*, they must put upon it a fringe with a ribband of blue. This last ordinance, it may be thought, like all the other ceremonies, being abrograted, is quite uninteresting to us. But, if we consider it attentively, we shall find it by no means uninstructive. It shews us,

I. The end which we ought to aim at—

That, for which the use of the fringe was appointed to the Jews, is equally necessary for us; namely, to preserve continually upon our minds a sense of,

1. Our duty to God—

[We are told to "walk in the fear of the Lord all the day long." For this purpose we should have the commandments of God ever, as it were, before our eyes. It is not unuseful to have habitually some short portion of the word of God, some one precept or promise, for our meditation through the day, especially at those intervals when the mind has nothing particular to engage its attention. The expediency of such an habit appears from the text itself: for, if we have nothing good at hand for our meditations, "the eye and the heart" will furnish evil enough. In our unconverted state we uniformly, as God himself expresses it, "go a whoring after these:" our affections are estranged from God, and our thoughts from time to time fix on some vanity which our eyes have seen, or on some evil which our own wicked heart has suggested. How desirable were it, instead of having our minds thus occupied, to have them filled with heavenly contemplations; to be searching out our duty; to be examining our own hearts in relation to it; and to be inquiring continually wherein we can make our profiting to appear!]

2. Our obligations to him—

[How strong and energetic are the expressions in our text respecting this! "I am your God: I have redeemed you in order that I might be so to the utmost possible extent: and I consider all that I am, and all that I have, as yours." If these mercies, as far as they were vouchsafed to the Jews, deserved to be had in continual remembrance, how much greater cause have *we* to remember them; *we*, who have been redeemed, not from Egypt, but from hell itself; and not by power only, but by price, even by the precious blood of God's only-begotten Son; and who have such an interest in God, that he not merely dwells *amongst* us, but *in* us, being one with us, as he is one with Christ himself[a]! Methinks,

[a] John xv. 5. & xvii. 21—23. & 1 Cor. vi. 17.

Methinks, instead of finding it difficult to turn our minds to this subject, it may well appear strange that we can for a moment fix them upon any thing else. Were we day and night to "meditate on the loving-kindness of our God, our souls would be filled as with marrow and fatness, and our mouth would praise him with joyful lips[b]."]

The ordinance before us goes further still, and prescribes,

II. The means by which we are to obtain it—

True it is that no distinctions in dress are prescribed to us: the ordinance in this respect is annulled. But, as a means to an end, the appointment of the fringe may teach us,

1. To make a spiritual improvement of sensible objects—

[*This was the direct intent of the fringes* on their garments: they were as monitors, to remind the people of their duty and obligations. And why may not we receive similar admonitions from every thing around us? Has not our blessed Lord set us the example? For instance, What part of husbandry is there which he has not made a source of spiritual instruction? the ploughing, the sowing, the weeding, the growth, the reaping, the carrying, the winnowing, the destruction of the chaff, and the treasuring up of the wheat, are all improved by him in this view. There are some things also which he has expressly ordained to be used for this end. What is the water in baptism, but to remind us of "the answer of a good conscience towards God[c]?" What are the bread and wine in the Lord's supper, but to be signs to us of his body broken, and his blood shed, for the sins of the whole world? We acknowledge that those things only which he has *appointed* to be signs, are *of necessity* to be used as such; but we are *at liberty* to use every thing in that view; and so far from its being superstitious to do so, it is highly reasonable and proper to do it: it then only becomes superstitious, when it is *rested in as an end*, or *used as a mean for an end which it has no proper tendency to effect*. Some have been offended with the use of the cross in baptism: and if it were intended as any kind of charm, they might well be offended with it: but it is, as the Liturgy expresses it, "a token that hereafter the child shall not be ashamed to confess the faith of Christ crucified:" and, if it serve to impress the minds of the sponsors in that light, it is well: if it do not, the fault is not in *it*, but in *them*. The same may we say in reference to the names, the titles, and the habits that are in use amongst us. Our Christian name, as it is called, should never be

[b] Ps. lxiii. 3—6. [c] 1 Pet. iii. 21.

be mentioned without bringing to our remembrance HIM, "whose we are, and whom we are bound to serve." The titles which are given to men, either on account of their rank in society, or of their consecration to the sacred office of the Ministry, may well be improved for that end for which they were originally given; not merely to shew to others what respect was due to the individuals, but to shew to the individuals themselves what might justly be expected of them, and what their rank and office required: the one should maintain his *honour* unsullied; the other should be so heavenly in his deportment as to constrain all to *revere* him. In this view, the use of the surplice was doubtless well intended; and happy would it be if all who wear it were reminded, as often as they put it on, how pure and spotless they ought to be, both in their hearts and lives. The very sight of a lofty church should remind us, that we are temples of the Living God; whilst the spire pointing upwards, may well direct us to lift up our hearts to God.

Let us not be misunderstood. We contend not for any of these things as necessary; but we learn from our text that they may be rendered subservient to a blessed end, and that it is our privilege to make every thing around us a step towards heaven.]

2. To get the law itself written in our hearts—

[Whilst the fringes had in themselves a practical use, they were also emblematical of benefits which were to be more fully bestowed under the Christian dispensation. As a sign they are abolished: but the thing signified remains in undiminished force. What the thing signified was, we are at no loss to determine: it was, that the law, of which a visible memorial was to be worn by *the Jews*, was to be inscribed in lively characters on *our* hearts. To this effect Moses speaks repeatedly, when giving directions respecting those other memorials of the law, which were to be worn on the forehead, and on the neck, and arms: "These words which I command thee this day shall be in thine *heart:* and thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes[d]." And again, "Ye shall lay up these my words in *your heart* and in *your soul*[e]." Hence the real design of God even as it respected *them*, and much more as it respects *us*, is evident. Moreover, God has promised this very thing to us, as the distinguishing blessing of the new covenant: "I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it on their hearts[f]."

Now this is the true way to attain that constant sense of our duty and obligations to God, which have been before mentioned. For, if his law be written on our hearts, we shall find the same disposition to meditate upon it, as a covetous man does to meditate upon

[d] Deut. vi. 6—9. [e] Deut. xi. 18—20. See also Prov. iii. 3.
[f] Jer. xxxi. 33, with Heb. viii. 10.

upon his gains, and an ambitious man on his distinctions. It is true, the heart has more to struggle with in the one case than the other; but, in proportion as divine grace prevails, holy exercises will be easy and delightful.]

3. To exhibit that law in our lives—

[The fringe was a distinction which shewed to every one of what religion they were. Thus there is a singularity which we also are to maintain: we are to be "holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners." If others will not walk with us in the narrow path of holiness, it is not our fault that we are singular, but theirs: we are no more blameable for differing from them, than Noah, Lot, Daniel, or Elijah were for differing from the people amongst whom they lived. As to singularity in dress, it is rather to be avoided than desired. Our distinctions must be found only in the conformity of our lives to the Word of God. Whilst the world are clad in gay attire, let us "put on the Lord Jesus Christ," and be "clothed with humility:" yea, let us "put off the old man which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and put on the new man, which, after God, is created in righteousness and true holiness." This is the way to honour God; and the more we strive to adorn our holy profession, the more peace and happiness we shall enjoy in it. In a word, holiness is our fringe: let us wear it: let us not be ashamed of it, but rather endeavour to "make our light to shine before men, that they may see our good works, and glorify our Father which is in heaven." Of course, I must not be understood to recommend any thing like ostentation: *that* is hateful both to God and man: but a bold open, manly confession of Christ crucified is the indispensable duty of all who are called by his name: and "if we deny him, he will assuredly deny us." I say then again, let us wear the fringe, and not indulge a wish to hide it. But let us be careful that "the ribband be of blue:" it must not be of any fading colour: our piety must be uniform in all places, and unchanging under all circumstances. We must be the same in the world as in the house of God. We must be "stedfast, immoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord;" and then we are assured, that "our labour shall not be in vain in the Lord."]

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## CXII.

### KORAH'S REBELLION.

Numb. xvi. 38. *The censers of these sinners against their own souls, let them make them broad plates for a covering of the altar: for they offered them before the Lord; therefore they are hallowed: and they shall be a sign unto the children of Israel.*

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IT is painful, in perusing the history of the Israelites, to see how constantly they were murmuring and rebelling against God. Persons who are ignorant of their own hearts are ready to conceive of them as more perverse and obstinate than the rest of mankind: but they who know what human nature is, behold in their rebellions a true picture of mankind at large. In the chapter before us we have an exact representation of a popular tumult: we see the motives and principles by which factious demagogues are actuated, and the lamentable evils which they produce. The censers of which our text speaks were formed into plates for a covering of the altar, that they might be a sign to all future generations: and, though we have not now the altar before us, they are no less a sign to us, than they were to the Israelites of old.

Let us consider,

I. The history before us—

Korah, Dathan, and Abiram raised a rebellion against Moses and Aaron—

[Let us mark how they proceeded. They complained that Moses and Aaron had usurped an undue authority over them: and that Moses in particular had ensnared them, and brought them into the wilderness for that very purpose[a]. For the purpose of making an invidious comparison between their former situation in Egypt and their present state[b], they represented Egypt as "a land flowing with milk and honey." As to any personal interest, they disclaimed any regard to that; and professed to be actuated by a generous concern for the public welfare[c]. In a word, they were true patriots: they were enemies to usurpation and tyranny, and friends to the liberties of the people. Liberty and Equality was their motto[d].

Such were their professions: and by these they imposed upon the people, and rendered them dissatisfied with the government both in Church and State.

But what were their real principles? They *envied* the power and dignity with which their governors were invested, and were *ambitious* to obtain a like pre-eminence for themselves. As for any desire to ameliorate the state of the people at large, they had it not: a patriotic concern for others was a mere pretext, a popular cry raised for the pursose of gaining partisans. Korah was at the head of the Levites, and Dathan and Abiram were "men

[a] ver. 13, 14. [b] ib. [c] ver. 3. [d] ib.

"men of renown among the princes of the congregation:" but they were not satisfied: they could endure no dignity superior to their own; and this was the true cause of all their discontent and clamour[e]: and if by means of this insurrection they could have obtained the distinction which they aimed at, not a word more would have been uttered on the subject of national grievances; nor would one hundredth part the care have been taken to prevent them. It is impossible to read the history and not to see that this was the true state of the case.

What an insight does this give us into that which is usually dignified with the name of patriotism! If ever there was a mild and just Governor, it was Moses. If ever there was a pious, affectionate, and diligent Minister, it was Aaron. If ever there was a well-administered government both in Church and State, it was at that time. If ever people had cause to be satisfied and happy, it was then. There was not a single ground of sorrow amongst all the people, except that which had arisen solely from their own perverseness, their detention in the wilderness. Yet a few factious demagogues prevail to spread dissatisfaction through the whole camp: and their oppressed state of bondage in Egypt is declared to be preferable to the grievances which they then experienced.]

But, in fact, their rebellion was against God himself—

[This is plainly declared to them by Moses[f]. What matter was there of complaint against Aaron? He did only what God had commanded him: and was he to be blamed for that? Moses forbears to make the same apology for himself: but his observation was equally applicable to himself, who had done nothing but by the express command of God. The conspirators then were in reality fighting against God himself, by whose direction every measure of the government had been taken. Moreover there was a typical design in these divine appointments, which this conspiracy was calculated to defeat. Thus, whilst envy and ambition characterized the conduct of the conspirators towards man, they betrayed also the grossest impiety and presumption towards God.]

The best estimate of their conduct may be found in the punishment inflicted for it—

[This was truly awful. Moses had obtained mercy from God for the congregation at large; but the leaders of the rebellion must be punished. Accordingly, whilst Dathan and Abiram, together with their wives, and families, and adherents, stood in the door of their tents, setting God himself, as it were, at defiance, Moses declared by what an extraordinary judgment they should

[e] ver. 7. [f] ver. 11.

should perish: and no sooner had he spoken, than the judgment was inflicted: "the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed them all up, with all that appertained unto them." As for the 250 persons who presumed to make their appeal to God respecting their title to the priesthood, "a fire came forth from the Lord, and consumed them all." Terrible was this if viewed only as a temporal judgment: but if considered in reference to the eternal world, it was awful indeed! That it might be kept in remembrance for the instruction of future ages, "the censers, in which they had offered incense, were ordered to be made into broad plates for a covering of the altar."]

It will be proper then that we distinctly consider,

II. The instruction to be gathered from it—

To us, no less than to the Jews, does this event most clearly speak. It shews us,

1. That sin is an act of hostility against our own souls—

[These rebels might be said to sin against their governors and against God; but they were "sinners also against their own souls:" and, had the object of their desire been the destruction of their own souls, they could not have prosecuted their end by any surer means. Little is this thought of by those who live in sin: but, whatever be the sin which they commit, the effect is still the same[g]. If a man will only keep from sin, he may defy all the assaults either of men or devils. Men may destroy his body, but they cannot touch his soul. Satan himself cannot hurt his soul, without his own consent. Sin is the only medium by which the soul can receive any injury. But that inflicts upon it a deadly wound: that destroys its innocence and peace: that brings down upon it the wrath of an incensed God: that subjects it to everlasting misery. See how the earth swallowed up some, and how the fire consumed others; and there you will learn the fate of all who die in their sins: hell will open wide its mouth to swallow them up, and unquenchable fire will consume them as its proper and appointed fuel — — — O that men were wise and would consider this; and turn, every one of them, from the evil of their ways!]

2. That opposition to constituted authorities is highly displeasing to God—

[We are far from denying that there is such a thing as real patriotism: nor do we mean to say that tyranny and oppression *may* not rise to such a height, as to justify the overthrow of an existing government. But this we say, that a real Christian will not be hasty to complain of grievances, even where they do exist; much less will he bear the smallest resemblance to these factious

[g] Prov. viii. 36.

factious people, whose case we have been considering. The Christian is one of "them that are quiet in the land." He regards government as God's ordinance; and the persons who are invested with authority as God's representatives. He considers that, in obeying them, he obeys God; and in unnecessarily and vexatiously opposing them, he opposes God: and he knows that "God is the avenger of all such," yea, that such persons "shall receive to themselves damnation[h]:" the government itself may justly inflict punishment upon them; and God himself will punish such conduct in the eternal world. Persons of this stamp often pretend to religion: and so they did in the days of the Apostles: but those who "despise dominion, and speak evil of dignities," have a "woe" denounced against them: their spirit is justly marked as a compound of envy, covetousness, and ambition; and having resembled Cain and Balaam in their spirit, they shall resemble Korah in their fate: they shall be eternal monuments of God's heavy displeasure[i].

Happy would it be if persons who are of a factious and turbulent disposition would look occasionally on *these* "*censers*," and reap the instruction which they are intended to convey!]

3. That a rejection of Christ must of necessity prove fatal to the soul—

[Moses as the Governor, and Aaron as the High Priest, of Israel, were types and representatives of the Lord Jesus Christ[k]: and in rebelling againt *them*, they virtually rebelled against *him* also. Thus, amongst ourselves, how many are there who say, "We will not have this man to reign over us[l]!" Some complain of his *authority*, as imposing an insupportable yoke upon them; and others of his *priesthood*, as prohibiting any access to God except through him as the only Mediator. But what the issue of such rebellion will be, we are faithfully warned, and *that* too with some reference, it should seem, to the judgments exercised on Korah and his company[m]. At all events, if the opposers of Moses and Aaron were so fearfully destroyed, we may be sure that a far heavier judgment awaits the contemners and opposers of Christ[n]———Let those who do not thankfully come to God by Christ, and unreservedly obey his holy will, be instructed by these events———In particular, we intreat them to act like Israel in the case before us: "All Israel that were gathered round the tents of Dathan and Abiram, fled at the cry of them: for they said, Lest the earth swallow us up also[o]." Could we but hear the cry of those that are in hell, we should no longer sit supine and confident. O let us realize this thought ere it be too late, and "flee in earnest from the wrath to come!"]

[h] Rom. xiii. 1, 2. [i] Jude 8, 11.
[k] Acts vii. 37—39. Heb. viii. 1, 2. & ix. 11, 12. [l] Luke xix. 14.
[m] Heb. x. 26, 27. [n] ib. ver. 28, 29. with Luke xix. 27.
[o] ver. 34.

## CXIII.

### AARON'S INTERCESSION.

Numb. xvi. 48. *And he stood between the dead and the living: and the plague was stayed.*

CORRUPT as human nature is, there are some sins which we scarcely think it possible for a rational being to be guilty of; and, if it were suggested to us that we ourselves were in danger of committing them, we should be ready to reply, "Is thy servant a dog, that he should do this thing?" Such is the sin which all the congregation of Israel committed on the very day after the death of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram. These three persons had excited a rebellion against Moses and Aaron; Korah and his company aspiring to the priesthood, and Dathan and Abiram, with their friends, affecting the office of supreme governor. For this their impiety they had been severely punished; Korah and his company being destroyed by fire that issued from the tabernacle; and all the relatives of Dathan and Abiram being swallowed up by an earthquake. These signal judgments, one would have thought, should have effectually silenced every murmur throughout the camp: but, instead of being humbled, the people were the more enraged; and murmured more than ever against Moses and Aaron, complaining, that the people who had been destroyed were "the people of the Lord," and that Moses and Aaron had been their murderers: "Ye have killed the people of the Lord." God now renewed his threatening to destroy them: but Moses and Aaron "fell upon their faces," as they had done frequently before[a], and importuned God to spare them. God however would not spare them, but sent a plague among them for their destruction. But no sooner did Moses perceive that "the plague was begun," than he sent Aaron with an offering of incense to arrest its progress. Aaron went immediately into the midst of the people, and succeeded according to his wishes: "he stood between

[a] Compare ver. 45. with Numb. xiv. 5. & xvi. 4, 22.

tween the dead and the living: and the plague was stayed."

This subject is to be considered in a two-fold view;

I. As an historical fact—

In this view it is worthy of particular attention. We cannot but admire,

1. The interposition of Aaron—

[If ever opposition was unreasonable, it was then: if ever a people had offended beyond all sufferance, it was at that time. Well might Moses and Aaron have said, "We have interceded for you often enough: we have repeatedly saved every one of you from destruction: and now, because God has seen fit to punish some of the ringleaders in rebellion, we are charged with having killed them. If mercies will not reclaim you, it is high time that judgments should be tried." But not a thought of this kind entered into their hearts. They were filled with nothing but compassion and love. They fell on their faces to intercede for these rebellious people, as much as if they had received no provocation at their hands. The expedient suggested by Moses was instantly carried into effect: and Aaron, at his advanced age, ran with haste into the midst of the congregation, to make an atonement for them. He did not know but that the incensed people would wreak their vengeance upon him, as they had frequently threatened to do; and put him to death, as the author of their present sufferings. Nor could he be certain, but that, if he ran into the midst of the plague, it might sweep him away together with the rest. But he thought not of himself, nor listened for a moment to any personal considerations. He was intent only on saving the lives of his fellow-creatures.

What a glorious example did he afford to all future Ministers! What a blessing would it be to the Church, if all her priests were like him; if all could say "I count not my life dear to me, so that I may but fulfil my ministry[b];" "most gladly will I spend and be spent for my people, though, the more abundantly I love them, the less I be loved[c]:" "I could wish even to be accursed after the example of Christ, if I might but by any means save only some[d]:" yea, most cheerfully would "I suffer all things for their sakes, that they might obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory[e]"! Were there more tender compassion amongst us, more ardent love, more self-denying zeal, more active exertion to "pluck our people as brands out of the fire," and more willingness to perish in the attempt, we might not stop the mouths of gainsayers, it is true; but "we should save

[b] Acts xx. 24. [c] 2 Cor. xii. 15. [d] Rom. ix. 3. 1 Cor. ix. 22.
[e] 2 Tim. ii. 10.

save many souls alive," and have them to be "our joy and crown of rejoicing" to all eternity. O that "God would speak the word, and that great might be the company of such preachers[f]!"]

2. The effect of it—

[How wonderful! No sooner does the cloud of incense arise from Aaron's hands, than the plague is stayed! On the day before, 250 censers full of incense had been offered at the tabernacle, and had brought instantaneous destruction on the offerers: now the incense from one single censer averts destruction from all the congregation of Israel. The plague was spreading its ravages with such rapidity, that already, notwithstanding Aaron's haste, 14,700 persons had died of it: but the moment he reached the spot, the arm of justice was arrested, and the sword fell from the hand of the destroying angel. It proceeded irresistibly till it came to Aaron; but could not advance one hair's breadth beyond him. On the one side of him all were dead; on the other, all remained alive. What a testimony was this to Aaron's divine appointment! What a refutation was here of the accusations brought against him! and, above all, what an encouragement was here given to all future generations to abound in prayer and intercession! Oh! what might not be effected for the souls of men, if all Ministers were men of prayer, and all who profess themselves the servants of the Lord would interpose between the living and the dead! O that "a spirit of prayer might be poured out upon us" all! If only we took our fire from off the altar of burnt-offering, the smoke of our incense should come up with acceptance before God: "We might ask what we would, and it should be done unto us[g]."]

As a history this passage is instructive: but it is no less so,

II. As an emblematic record—

They who read the Scriptures *merely* as a history, read them like children. The Old Testament, as well as the New, contains the deepest mysteries: and, to understand it aright, we must consider it not only "in the letter, but in the spirit." Now the passage before us has undoubtedly an emblematic import: it was intended to shadow forth,

1. The means by which God's wrath is to be averted—

[Aaron himself was a type of Christ; and the atonement which he now made for the people was typical of that great atonement

[f] Ps. lxviii. 11. [g] John xv. 7.

atonement which Christ himself was in due time to make for the sins of the whole world. There was indeed no animal slain; for there was now no time for sacrifice: but the fire taken from off the altar of burnt-offering, whereon the sacrifices were consumed, was considered on this occasion in the same light as "an atonement:" and the incense burnt on this occasion typified the intercession of our great High Priest. By these two, the sacrifice and intercession of Christ, the whole world is to be saved. To this the whole Scriptures bear witness. What can be clearer than the prediction of the prophet Isaiah; "He bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors[h]?" What more express than the declaration of the beloved Apostle; "If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, and he is the propitiation for our sins[i]." The one intent of the Epistle to the Hebrews is to establish and illustrate this glorious truth.

Let us then look beyond Aaron and the rebellious Israelites, to Christ and a rebellious world. Let us see with what eager desire for our welfare HE left the bosom of his Father, and came into the midst of us, not at the risk of his life, but on purpose to "make his soul an offering for sin[j]." Let us hear too with what compassion he interceded for his very murderers; "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." Let us look through the shadow to the substance. Then shall we have a right understanding of the history when we view it as "a shadow of good things to come."]

## 2. The efficacy of them for the end proposed—

[Death was arrested in its career, and could proceed no farther. And to what is it owing that our rebellious world has not long since been consigned over to destruction? "Not unto us, O Lord Jesu Christ, not unto us, but unto thy name be the praise:" thou by thine atoning blood has made reconciliation between God and us; and by thy prevailing intercession hast procured for us the mercies we so greatly need. Can we doubt whether this statement be true? St. Paul expressly tells us that Christ is "our Peace:" and, in that view of him, exultingly exclaims, "Who is he that condemneth? it is Christ that died, yea rather that is risen again, who also maketh intercession for us[k]:" and he tells us further, that "Christ is able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for us[l]."

Here then again let us view the history in its proper light: and let us learn, Whither to look, and, In whom to hope, whensoever our sins have raised the divine displeasure against us. Let us learn too the force of that Apostolic argument, so weak in

[h] Isai. liii. 12. [i] 1 John ii. 1, 2. [j] Isai. liii. 10.
[k] Rom. viii. 34. [l] Heb. vii. 25.

in logic, but so sound in Theology, "If the censer in Aaron's hand prevailed for the preservation of one rebellious people from temporal death, how much more shall the atonement and intercession of Christ prevail for the everlasting salvation of our souls, yea, for the souls of the whole world[m]!"]

From the whole of this subject let us LEARN the duties,

1. Of faith—

[In the case before us, the benefit was conferred on account of Aaron's faith, just as our Lord afterwards healed the paralytic on account of the faith of those who brought him: but in the great concerns of our souls, nothing can be obtained but through the exercise of our own faith. Notwithstanding our great High Priest has performed the whole of his office, no benefit will accrue to us, unless we believe in him. In this respect we are to resemble the Israelites when bitten by the fiery serpents; we must look unto the brazen serpent in order to be healed; or, in other words, we must regard the Lord Jesus Christ as our Advocate and propitiation: we must renounce every other hope, and "flee for refuge to him as to the hope set before us." On the one hand, we must not construe the forbearance of God as an approbation of our ways, as though we had no ground for fear; nor, on the other hand, should the greatness of our guilt or the multitude of our provocations make us despair, as though there were no ground for hope: but, viewing Christ as the appointed Mediator between God and us, we should "go to God through him," trusting to his promise, that "he will in no wise cast us out."]

2. Of love—

[We see not men struck dead around us under any visible marks of the divine displeasure: but we know that "God is angry with the wicked every day," and is summoning multitudes to his tribunal under the weight and guilt of all their sins. What are we then about? How can we behold these things with such indifference? Why do we loiter? Why do we not run, as it were, into the midst of the congregation, in order, if possible, to awaken them from their stupor, and to save their precious souls? Why do we not at all events betake ourselves to prayer? We have, at least, our censers nigh at hand, if only we would take fire from the altar of burnt-offering, and burn incense on them. Let it not be said, "This is the work of Ministers:" doubtless it is so; but not of them exclusively: they should lead the way, it is true, and be examples to the flock; but others should imitate their example, and "be followers of them, as they are of Christ;" or rather, should follow Christ, whether

[m] See Heb. ix. 13, 14.

whether *they* will follow him or not. I call you then, every one of you, to forget yourselves, as it were, and your own personal concerns, and to be swallowed up with love and pity for your perishing fellow-creatures. Remember that they are not a whit safer by reason of their delusions. They may call rebels, "the people of the Lord;" but that will not make them the Lord's people. They may cry out against God's judgments as injustice and cruelty; but that will not prevent those judgments from being inflicted, either on others or themselves: yea rather, it will bring down those very judgments the more speedily, and more heavily, upon them. Try then to stir up within you the feelings of men, the feelings of Christians: "Of some have compassion, making a difference: and others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire, hating even the garment spotted by the flesh[n]."]

[n] Jude 22, 23.

## CXIV.

### AARON'S ROD THAT BUDDED.

Numb. xvii. 10. *And the Lord said unto Moses, Bring Aaron's rod again before the testimony, to be kept for a token against the rebels; and thou shalt quite take away their murmurings from me, that they die not.*

ONE cannot read one page in the Bible without seeing abundant evidence that God delighteth in the exercise of mercy. Judgment is with great truth called, "his strange act:" it is an act to which he never resorts from but absolute neecssity: but mercy is his darling attribute; and to that he is inclined, even when the conduct of his enemies calls most loudly for tokens of his displeasure. Of this we have a surprising instance in the chapter before us. The competitors with Aaron for the high priesthood had been struck dead by fire whilst they were in the very act of presenting their offerings to God; whilst their associates in rebellion, with their whole families, were swallowed up by an earthquake. These judgments produced a murmuring throughout the camp; and 14,700 were swept off by a plague, which was stopped only by the interposition of Aaron. The people now were dumb: but God knew that, though

though intimidated, they were not so convinced, but that they would on some future occasion renew their pretensions to the priesthood, and thereby provoke him to destroy them utterly. Of his own rich mercy therefore he proposed to give them a sign, which should for ever silence their murmurings, and preclude the necessity of heavier judgments.

In opening this subject we shall shew,

I. What God did to confirm the Aaronic priesthood—

He commanded the head of every tribe to bring a rod or staff to Moses, who inscribed on every one of them the owner's name. These all together were placed before the ark: and the people were taught to expect, that the rod belonging to that tribe which God had chosen for the priesthood, should blossom; whilst all the other rods should remain as they were. On the morrow the rods were all brought forth. The owners severally took their own: and Aaron's was distinguished from the rest by the mark proposed; "it was budded, and brought forth buds, and blossomed blossoms, and yielded almonds." The controversy being thus decided, God commanded that Aaron's rod should be brought again before the ark, and "be kept *for a token against the rebels*." How long it was preserved, cannot be ascertained; but that it was for a very long period, is certain; because St. Paul speaks of that, and the golden pot that had manna, as known appendages to the ark[a]. Thus its use was not confined to that generation: it remained to future ages,

1. An evidence of God's decision—

[The change wrought upon the rod in one single night, together with its having at once all the different stages of vegetation, "buds, blossoms, fruit," *this* was sufficient to convince the most incredulous: no room could hereafter be left for doubt upon the subject. Nor do we find from this time even to the days of King Uzziah, that any one dared to usurp again the priestly office.]

2. A memorial of his mercy—

[Justly might the people have been utterly destroyed for their continued murmurings against God. But God here shewed, that

[a] Heb. ix. 4.

that "he desireth not the death of sinners, but rather that they should turn from their wickedness and live." This was the avowed design of the test which God proposed; "It shall quite take away their murmurings from me, that they die not." What astonishing condescension! Was it not enough for him to make the appointment, but must he use such methods to convince unreasonable men; to convince those, whom neither mercies nor judgments had before convinced? Had it been given, like Gideon's fleece, to assure a doubting saint, we should the less have wondered at it; but when it was given as a superabundant proof to silence the most incorrigible rebels, it remained a monument to all future ages, that God is indeed "full of compassion, slow to anger, and of great kindness."]

3. A witness for him, in case he should be hereafter compelled to inflict his judgments upon them—

[It is well called "a token against the rebels." God might at all future periods point to it, and ask, "What could have been done more for my people, than I have done for them[b]?" Have they not procured my judgments by their own wilful and obstinate transgressions[c]? — — — By this means, whatever judgments he should from that time inflict, he would "be justified in what he ordained, and be clear when he judged[d]."]

If we bear in mind that the Aaronic priesthood was typical, we shall see the propriety of considering,

II. What he has done to confirm the priesthood of Christ—

The whole Epistle to the Hebrews is written to shew that the Aaronic priesthood typified that of the Lord Jesus, and was accomplished by it. This will account for the jealousy which God manifested on the subject of the Aaronic priesthood, and the care that he took to establish it on an immoveable foundation. Whether there was any thing typical in the peculiar means by which it was established, we will not pretend to determine: but certain it is that there is a striking correspondence between the blossoming of Aaron's rod, and those things by which Christ's priesthood is established. Two things in particular we shall mention as placing beyond all doubt the appointment of the Lord Jesus to the priestly office:

1. The

[b] Isai. v. 3, 4. [c] Jer. ii. 17. & iv. 18. [d] Ps. li. 4.

1. The resurrection of Christ—

[Christ is expressly called, "a rod out of the stem of Jesse[e];" and so little prospect was there, according to human appearances, that he should ever flourish, that it was said of him, "He shall grow up as a tender plant, and as a root out of the dry ground:" "He is despised and rejected of men[f]." If this was his state whilst yet alive, how much more must it be so when he was dead and buried! His enemies then triumphed over him as a deceiver, and his followers despaired of ever seeing his pretensions realized. But behold, with the intervention of one single day, this dry rod revived, and blossomed to the astonishment and confusion of all his adversaries. Now indeed it appeared that God had "appointed him to be both Lord and Christ[g]." Now it was proved, that "his enemies should become his footstool[h]." On his ascension to heaven he was laid up, as it were, beside the testimony in the immediate presence of his God, to be "*a token against the rebels.*" There is he "a token," that God desires to save his rebellious people: that "he has laid help for them upon one that is mighty:" that all which is necessary for their salvation is already accomplished: that their great High Priest, having made atonement for them, is entered within the veil; and that "he is able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them." If any shall now reject him, he will be "a swift witness against them;" and God will be justified, yea he will glorify himself in their eternal condemnation.]

2. The spread of the Gospel—

[The Gospel is represented by God as "the rod of his strength[i]:" and in reference, as it should seem, to the very miracle before us, its miraculous propagation through the earth is thus foretold: "God shall cause them that come of Jacob to take root: Israel shall blossom and bud, and fill the face of the world with fruit[k]." Consider how the Gospel militated against all the prejudices and passions of mankind, and by whom it was to be propagated, (a few poor fishermen,) and it will appear, that the blossoming of Aaron's rod was not a more unlikely event than that Christianity should be established in the world. Yet behold, a very short space of time was sufficient for the diffusion of it throughout the Roman empire; and, from its first propagation to the present moment, not all the efforts of men or devils have been able to root it out. The spread of Mahometanism affords no parallel to this; because that was propagated by the sword, and tended rather to gratify, than counteract, the sinful passions of mankind. The doctrine of the cross not only gained acceptance through the world, but transformed the very natures of men into

[e] Isai. xi. 1. [f] Isai. liii. 2, 3.
[g] Acts ii. 32, 36. [h] ib. ver. 34, 35. [i] Ps. cx. 2.
[k] Isai. xxvii. 6. with Matt. xxiv. 14.

into the divine image. Such operations, visible in every place, and in every stage of their progress from their first budding to the production of ripe fruit, could not but prove, that the priesthood which it maintained was of divine appointment; that the doctrine which it published was suited to our necessities; and that all who embraced it should be saved by it. In this view every individual believer is a witness for God, and "a token against the rebels;" inasmuch as he manifests to all the power and efficacy of the Gospel salvation: he is "an epistle of Christ, known and read of all men;" and, by his earnestness in the ways of God, he says to all around him, "How shall ye escape, if ye neglect so great salvation?" Yes; every soul that shall have found mercy through the mediation of our great High Priest, will, in the last day, rise up in judgment against the despisers of his salvation, and condemn them: nor will the condemned criminals themselves be able to offer a plea in arrest of judgment.]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who are unconscious of having rejected Christ—

[It is not necessary in order to a rejection of Christ that we should combine against him as the Israelites did against Aaron: we reject him, in fact, if we do not receive him for the ends and purposes for which he was sent. Our inquiry then must be, not, Have I conspired against him, and openly cast him off? but, Am I daily making HIM the one medium of my access to God, and expecting salvation through him alone?——— If we have not thus practically regarded him in his Mediatorial character, we are decided rebels against God.]

2. Those who begin to be sensible of their rebellion against him—

[Men are apt to run to extremes: the transition from presumption to despondency is very common. See how rapidly it took place in the rebellious Israelites! No sooner did they see the controversy decided, than they cried, "Behold we die, we perish, we all perish! Whosoever cometh any thing near unto the tabernacle of the Lord shall die: shall we be consumed with dying[1]?" What consternation and terror did they here express! Just before, they would be priests, and come to the very altar of God: and now, they will not "come any thing near the tabernacle," though it was their duty to bring their sacrifices to the very door thereof. So it is too often with us. Before we are convinced of sin, we cast off all fear of God's judgments; and, when convinced, we put away all hope of his mercy. Let it not be thus. The very means which God has used for our conviction, are proofs and evidences of his tender mercy——— Only let us come to him

[1] ver. 12, 13.

him through Christ, and all our past iniquities shall be "blotted out as a morning cloud."]

3. Those who confess him as their divinely appointed Mediator— .

[From this time the Israelites never presumed to approach the Lord but through the mediation of the High Priest. Whether they offered sacrifices or gifts, they equally acknowledged the unacceptableness of them in any other than the appointed way. Thus must we do. Not any thing must be presented to God, or be expected from him, but in and through the Lord Jesus Christ. If we approach God in any other way, we shall find him "a consuming fire." Let this be remembered by us: it cannot possibly be too deeply engraven on our minds. If God manifested such indignation against those who disregarded the shadow, what must be the fate of those who disregard the substance? If we reject Christ, we have nothing to hope for; if we cleave unto him, we have nothing to fear.]

## CXV.

### THE LAW OF PURIFICATION.

Numb. xix. 17—20: *For an unclean person they shall take of the ashes of the burnt heifer of purification for sin, and running water shall be put thereto in a vessel; and a clean person shall take hyssop, and dip it in the water, and sprinkle it upon the tent, and upon all the vessels, and upon the persons that were there, and upon him that touched a bone, or one slain, or one dead, or a grave: and the clean person shall sprinkle upon the unclean on the third day and on the seventh day; and on the seventh day he shall purify himself, and wash his clothes, and bathe himself in water, and shall be clean at even. But the man that shall be unclean, and shall not purify himself, that soul shall be cut off from among the congregation, because he hath defiled the sanctuary of the Lord: the water of separation hath not been sprinkled upon him; he is unclean.*

AN inspired Apostle has acknowledged, that the yoke imposed upon the Jews was quite insupportable. Where the reason of the ordinances was apparent, and the observance of them easy, we may suppose that the people would cheerfully comply with them: but, in many cases, the rites prescribed were very burthensome; they laid the people under severe restraints, entailed upon them heavy expenses,

penses, deprived them of many comforts, and subjected them to great inconveniences, apparently without any adequate reason. This might be illustrated by many of the ordinances; but in none so forcibly as in that before us. The kind of defilement which was to be remedied, was as light and venial as could possibly be conceived: it implied no moral guilt whatever; nor could possibly in some cases be avoided: yet it rendered a person unclean seven days; and every thing that he touched, was also made unclean; and every person who might, however inadvertently, come in contact with any thing that had been touched by him, was also made unclean. Moreover, if any person that had contracted this ceremonial defilement, concealed it, or refused to submit to this prescribed form of purification, he was to be cut off from God's people. We do not wonder, that the proud heart of man should rise up in rebellion against such an ordinance as this: and still less do we wonder that the pious Jews should long for the Messiah, who was to liberate his people from such a yoke.

But if, on the one hand, this was the most burthensome ordinance, it was, on the other hand, the most edifying to those who could discover its true import. It may well be doubted whether in any other ordinance whatever there can be found so rich a variety of instructive matter, as may justly be deduced from that before us.

To confirm this assertion, we shall state,

I. Its typical import—

On this we shall dwell no longer than is necessary to prepare the way for the instruction which the subject is suited to convey. We will however, for the sake of perspicuity, call your attention to the ordinance under two distinct heads;

1. The preparation of the heifer for its destined use—

[A red heifer was *taken from the congregation;* it was to be *without spot or blemish;* and it must be one that had *never borne a yoke.* Being brought *without the camp,* it was slain in the

the presence of the priest, who with his finger *sprinkled the blood "directly before the tabernacle, seven times." The whole carcase* was then *burned* in his presence; (the skin, the flesh, the blood, the dung, were all burned together;) and some cedar-wood, and hyssop, and scarlet wool were burned with it. Then *the ashes* of the heifer were gathered up by another person, and *deposited in a clean place* without the camp.

Every minute particular of this ordinance we shall not attempt to explain: but its leading features are clear. We see here the Lord *Jesus Christ*, taken from, and separated for, *the whole mass of mankind*—We see him who was "*without blemish and without spot*," and who was *under no previous obligation* to suffer for us, coming voluntarily into the world for that express purpose—We see him *suffering* the most inconceivable agonies both in body and soul even *unto death, without the gates of Jerusalem*—We see him *sprinkling his own blood* before the mercy-seat of the Most High God, in order to effect a *perfect reconciliation* between God and us—And that one atonement which was offered by him for the sins of the whole world, we see to be of *perpetual efficacy* in the Church, and ever ready at hand to be applied for the purification of those who desire deliverance from sin and death.]

2. The application of it to that use—

[A portion of the ashes being put into a vessel, *running water* was poured upon them: and then a bunch of *hyssop* was dipped in the water, and the *unclean person*, together with every thing which had been defiled through him, was *sprinkled* with it. This was done on the *third day*, and on the *seventh day*; and then the unclean person was considered as purified from his defilement.

Here we behold *the Holy Spirit co-operating with the Lord Jesus Christ* in effecting the redemption of a ruined world. The Holy Spirit qualified the man Jesus for his work, and upheld him in it, and wrought miracles by him in confirmation of his mission, and raised him up from the dead, and bore witness to him in a visible manner on the day of Pentecost; and from that day to this has been imparting *to the souls of men* the benefits of the Redeemer's sacrifice. By working *faith* in our hearts, he enables us to apply to ourselves the promises of God, and thereby to obtain an interest in all that Christ has done and suffered for us. And by such *repeated applications* of the promises to ourselves, he conveys to us all the blessings of grace and glory.

That this *is* the import of the type we can have no doubt, since God himself has so explained it[a].]

This

[a] Heb. ix. 13, 14. We see particularly in this passage, what was the import of the living water with which the ashes were mixed: it intimated, that "Christ offered himself *through the eternal Spirit.*"

This may suffice for a general explanation of the ordinance: but we shall gain a still clearer insight into it by considering,

II. Its instructive tendency—

We do not apprehend that any Jew, perhaps not even Moses himself, could discover in it all that we do. Yet we would be extremely cautious of indulging our fancy, or of deducing from the ordinance any instruction which it is not well fitted to convey. We certainly keep within the bounds of sober interpretation, when we say, that we may learn from it,

1. Our universal need of a remedy against the defilement of sin—

[The contracting of defilement from the touch of a dead body, or a bone, or a grave, and the communicating of that defilement to every thing that was touched, and the rendering of that also a means of communicating defilement to others, intimated, that in our present state we cannot but receive defilement from the things around us; and that, whether intentionally or not, we are the means of diffusing the sad contagion of sin. "There is not a man that liveth, and sinneth not:" "in many things we all offend:" so that we may well adopt the language of the Psalmist, "Who can understand his errors? Cleanse thou me from my secret faults[b]"———Now as every one who was defiled, needed the purification that was appointed, so do we, even the most pure amongst us, need deliverance from guilt and corruption. However careful we are, we cannot plead exemption from the common lot of all: we are 'corrupted and corrupters[c],' every one of us; and are greatly indebted to our God, who has graciously appointed means for the purifying of our souls.]

2. The mysterious nature of that remedy prescribed to us in the Gospel—

[Some have said, Where mystery begins, religion ends. We rather would say, that Christianity is altogether a mystery in every part. Look at this typical representation, and say, whether there be no mystery in it. Can we fathom all its depths? or, if enabled by the light of the New Testament to declare its import, can we reduce it all to the dictates of reason? Look at the truths that are shadowed forth; is there nothing mysterious in them? Think of God's only dear Son, "in whom was no sin, becoming sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him." Think of the Holy Ghost, the third Person in the ever-blessed Trinity, concurring with him in his work,

[b] Ps. xix. 12. [c] Isai. i. 4.

work, and exercising his almighty power to render it effectual for our good. Is there no mystery in all this? Truly, "*great* is the mystery of godliness:" and the more we contemplate it, the more shall we be constrained to exclaim with the Apostle, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!"]

3. The precise manner in which that remedy becomes effectual—

[What was it that rendered the ordinance effectual for the purifying of an unclean person? Was there any necessary connexion between sprinkling the ashes of an heifer upon a person, and the cleansing him from sin? None at all. It was the divine appointment, and that only, that gave efficacy to it. Indeed, so far was it from being able of itself to cleanse a person from sin, that the very observance of the ordinance rendered every person unclean that was engaged in it. The killing of the heifer, the sprinkling of its blood, the burning of it, and the gathering up of the ashes, rendered all the persons who were occupied in those duties, unclean until the evening; and laid them under a necessity of washing both their body and their clothes, in order to their purification from the defilement they had contracted. All this shewed clearly enough that the ordinance in itself had no purifying power: it went further; it intimated, that neither could evangelical obedience cleanse us from sin: we cannot exercise repentance or faith, but we contract guilt through the imperfection of our graces: our tears, as a pious Prelate expresses it, need to be washed, and our repentances to be repented of. There is no virtue in them to cleanse us from sin: nay, there is no necessary connexion between the exercise of those graces in us, and the removal of guilt from our souls. If the devils were to repent, or to believe, we have no authority to say that they must therefore be restored to the state from which they fell: and, independent of the divine appointment, there is no more connexion between the death of Christ and *our* salvation, than between the same event and *theirs*. It is from the divine appointment only that the Gospel derives its power to save. It was from that source alone that the rod of Moses had power to divide the sea, or the brazen serpent to heal the wounded Israelites, or the waters of Jordan to cure Naaman of his leprosy: and consequently, if any of us obtain salvation, all ground of glorying in ourselves must be for ever excluded: our repentance, our faith, our obedience are necessary, as the sprinkling of the ashes; but the ultimate effect, namely, the salvation of our souls, is altogether the free gift of God for Christ's sake.

Unless we view this matter aright, we shall never know how entirely we are indebted to the free grace of God, or be sufficiently on our guard against self-preference and self-complacency.]

4. The indispensable necessity of resorting to it—

[If any person had contracted uncleanness, it signified nothing *how* the defilement came: he was unclean; and he must purify himself in the appointed way: and, if he refused to do so, he must be cut off. If, previous to his purification, he should presume to enter into the sanctuary, the sanctuary itself would be defiled.

Thus whether a man have sinned in a greater or less degree, he must seek to be cleansed by the blood and Spirit of Christ: he must embrace the Gospel as his only hope. It will be in vain to plead, that his sins have been small and unintentional, and that he does not deserve the wrath of God: one question only will be asked, "Is he a sinner? has he at any time, or in any way, contracted the smallest measure of defilement!" If any man be so free from sin, as never to have committed it once in his whole life in thought, word, or deed, let him reject the Gospel as unsuited to his state: but if the smallest evil have ever been indulged in his heart, he must submit to the purification that is prescribed. No other can be substituted in its place. He may say, as Naaman, Are not the waters of Abana and Pharpar as good as those of Jordan? But, allowing them to be as good, they will not have the same effect, because they are not appointed of God to that end. I say then to every child of man, "Repent, and believe the Gospel:" "Repent and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out:" "He that believeth shall be saved; and he that believeth not shall be damned." Think not to come to God in any other way than this; for heaven itself would be defiled by your admission thither, if you were not first purged from your sins by the blood and Spirit of Christ.]

5. The efficacy of it when duly applied—

[Every person who complied with the ordinance, was cleansed: and every one who has the blood and Spirit of Christ sprinkled on his soul, shall "be saved with an everlasting salvation." The argument which the Apostle uses in a fore-cited passage[d], deserves to be attentively considered. It is this; "If the legal purification availed for the smallest good, how shall not the Gospel method of purification avail for the greatest?" In this argument there would be no force at all, if only logically considered: but, if considered in connexion with the deep mysteries of the Gospel, it has all the force of demonstration. Consider who it was, whose blood was offered unto God for us? it was the blood of his co-equal, co-eternal Son. Consider who that Agent was, who co-operated with him in the making of this offering? it was "The Eternal Spirit," who, with the Father and the Son, is the Tri-une God. Consider these things, I say, and nothing will be too great for us to expect, if only we come to God

[d] Heb. ix. 13, 14.

God in his appointed way. Yes; our consciences shall be purged from guilt, and our souls be transformed into the divine image. Whatever our sins may have been, even "though of a crimson dye, they shall be made white as snow." Let the sinner view an unclean person under the law, excluded from the society of his dearest friends, and prohibited from all access to the sanctuary; and then, on the renewed sprinkling of the ashes, instantly brought into communion with the Lord's people, and invested with the privilege of drawing nigh to God: let him view this, I say, and he has a striking representation of the change that shall take place in his own condition, the very moment he is interested in the atonement of Christ. He shall instantly be numbered with the saints below, and assuredly be fellow-heir with "the saints in light." Let then this sprinkling be performed without delay: exercise faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Go to your great High Priest, and say, "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow." But remember, that you must repeat this sprinkling from day to day. The unclean person was to be sprinkled on the third day, and on the seventh: so must we be from time to time, even to the latest period of our lives.

Consider, Brethren, what I say; "and the Lord give you understanding in all things."]

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## CXVI.

### MOSES AND AARON SENTENCED TO DIE IN THE WILDERNESS.

Numb. xx. 12. *And the Lord spake unto Moses and Aaron, Because ye believed me not, to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore ye shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them.*

SCARCELY shall we find any portion of sacred history that is more calculated to affect a pious mind, than this. When we see judgments inflicted on the rebellious Israelites, we acknowledge without hesitation the justice and equity of God: we regret indeed that their impieties called for such severity; but we approve of the severity itself, or rather, regard it as lenient, in comparison of their deserts. But here our proud hearts are almost ready to revolt, and to exclaim, "Hath God forgotten to be gracious?" "Is it thus that God deals with his chosen servants, who for forty years have been indefatigable

in his service? Does he thus for one offence exclude them from the promised land, to the possession of which they had looked forward with such ardent desire and assured expectation?" But we are soon silenced with that unanswerable question, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" We are very incompetent to determine, what it becomes the divine Majesty to do. But though we are not to sit in judgment on his dispensations, we may with propriety inquire into the reasons of them, if only we do so with a view to vindicate his ways, and to gain that instruction which they are intended to convey. Let us then, whilst contemplating the exclusion of Moses and Aaron from the land of Canaan, consider,

I. The offence they committed—

Slight as it may appear to us, it was a complicated offence—

There was in it a mixture of,

1. Irreverence—

["God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of his saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are round about him[a]." But on this occasion Moses and Aaron seem to have forgotten that they were in the presence of God, or that there was any necessity to lead the murmurers to a becoming affiance in him. They should have reminded the people of his past mercies, and shewn them how to secure the continuance of his favours by penitence and prayer. But, notwithstanding "the glory of the Lord appeared unto them," they omitted, as he complains, "to sanctify him in the eyes of the children of Israel." This was a great offence. They should have remembered, that Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, had been devoured by fire before the Lord for irreverently offering common fire in their censers, instead of the fire that was burning on the altar: and that God on that occasion had said, "I will be sanctified in them that come nigh unto me, and before all the people I will be glorified[b]." There would therefore have been no ground to arraign the justice of God, even if he had smitten *them* in like manner on this occasion. Their exclusion from Canaan, though grievous, was less than their iniquity deserved.]

2. Anger—

[A certain kind of anger is allowable: nor is it wrong to testify that displeasure in words: but it must not be such an anger

[a] Ps. lxxxix. 7. [b] Lev. x. 3.

anger as transports us into unbecoming actions or vehement invectives. The expressions used by Moses on this occasion, shew, that his anger was by no means duly moderated. It did not terminate on the offence, but struck at the person of the offenders; towards whom nothing but pity, joined with faithful remonstrances, should have been exercised. Doubtless, his indignation was very hot, when he addressed the people, "Ye rebels:" and in this it is evident that Aaron also was a partaker with him. How sinful this was, we may judge from that declaration of our Lord, that "Whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council; and whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire[c]." Here then again we see that their exclusion from Canaan was justly merited.]

3. Disobedience—

[God had commanded Moses to "*speak* to the rock:" but Moses, in the paroxysm of his anger, *smote* it, yea, "smote it twice." Had Moses forgotten how strict God's injunctions had been respecting the furniture of the tabernacle, that every the smallest vessel or pin should be "made according to the pattern shewn to him in the mount?" Had he forgotten that, when bounds where set round mount Sinai, even a beast, if he should pass them, was to be pierced through with a dart? Had he and Aaron forgotten how strictly every the minutest service of the sanctuary was enjoined on the pain of death? How then could they dare thus to violate the divine commands? God himself complains of this as an act of direct *rebellion* against him[d]. Who then can wonder that God saw fit to mark it with a testimony of his displeasure? It is not improbable that God, in ordering Moses to *speak* to the rock, intended to reprove the Israelites, when they saw the rocks themselves more obedient to the divine command than they: But the disobedience of Moses altogether defeated this intention: yea, it was calculated to convey a most erroneous idea to those who understood the mystical import of this dispensation. The rock that had been smitten nine and thirty years before was a type of Christ, from whom, as smitten for our offences, the waters of life and salvation flow[e]. But Christ was not to be smitten *twice*: "he was *once* offered to bear the sins of many:" and it is henceforth by *speaking* to him, and addressing him in prayer and faith, that we are to receive renewed communications of his grace and mercy. But Moses and Aaron overlooked all this, (for, what will not people forget, when under the influence of passion?) and justly brought upon themselves this severe rebuke.]

4. Unbe-

[c] Compare ver. 10, 11. with Matt. v. 22.
[d] ver. 21. with Numb. xxvii. 14.
[e] Exod. xvii. 6. with 1 Cor. x. 4.

4. Unbelief—

[Of this in particular God accuses them; "Ye believed me not, to sanctify me." Whether they doubted the efficacy of a *word*, and therefore *smote* the rock; or whether they acted in their own strength, expecting the effect to be produced by their own act of striking the rock, instead of regarding God alone as the author of the mercy, we cannot say: we rather incline to the latter opinion, because of the emphatic manner in which they addressed the Israelites; "Ye rebels, must WE fetch you water out of this rock?" In either case they were under the influence of unbelief: for, distrust of God, or creature-confidence, are equally the effects of unbelief: the one characterized the conduct of those Israelites who were afraid to go up to take possession of the promised land; and the other, those who went up in their own strength, when God had refused to go before them. This was the offence which excluded the whole nation from the promised land: "they could not enter in because of unbelief[f]:" no wonder therefore, that, when Moses and Aaron were guilty of it, they were involved in the common lot.]

What has been said may suffice to shew that their offence was not so light as it may at first sight appear to be: but its enormity will be best seen in,

II. The punishment inflicted for it—

The sentence denounced against them was, that they should die in the wilderness, and be denied the privilege of leading the people into the promised land. This was,

1. An awful sentence—

[How distressing it was to them, we may judge from the prayer of Moses, who sought to have the sentence reversed: "O Lord God, I pray thee let me go over and see the good land!" But, as Moses himself tells us, "God was wroth with him, and would not hear him[g]." How loudly does this speak to *us!* If we reflect on the length of time that they had served the Lord; the exemplary manner in which they had conducted themselves; (oftentimes at the peril of their lives expostulating with the people, and seeking to avert the wrath of God from them;) and that this, as it respected Moses at least, was almost the only fault that he had committed: if we at the same time consider, how grievous the disappointment must have been to them to have all their hopes and expectations frustrated, now that they had nearly completed the destined period of their wanderings; truly we cannot but see in this dispensation the evil and bitterness of sin; and feel the importance of that admonition,

[f] Heb. iii. 19. [g] Deut. iii. 23—26.

nition, "Let us fear, lest a promise being left us of entering into God's rest, any of us should seem to come short of it[h]."

We know indeed that this sentence of exclusion did not extend to the Canaan that is above: and it is probable that many others who died in the wilderness, were therefore "judged and chastened of the Lord, that they might *not* be condemned with the world[i]:" nevertheless the record of their failure is "written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come[k]:" and as the great body of the nation were "examples unto us, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted," so may the example of Moses in particular teach us, that "if the righteous turn away from his righteousness, and commit iniquity, all his righteousness that he hath done shall not be mentioned; in his trespass that he hath trespassed, and in his sin that he hath sinned, in them shall he die[l]." Indeed this is the very lesson which St. Paul himself inculcates from the exclusion of the Israelites at large, and which is doubly forcible when arising from the failure of Moses; "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall[m]." Were a man as eminent as Paul himself, it would behove him to use the same vigilance as he; "keeping under his body, and bringing it into subjection, lest by any means, after having preached to others, he himself should be a cast-away[n]." Not he that "runneth well for a season," but "he that endureth to the end, shall be saved."]

2. An instructive sentence—

[Besides the general idea above suggested, there are several very important things prefigured in this dispensation.

First, it intimated *the insufficiency of the moral law to justify us.* Moses, the meekest of all the human race, had once "spoken unadvisedly with his lips[o];" and for that one trespass was excluded from the promised land[p]. Now, if we consider the typical nature of the whole Mosaic economy, we shall not wonder, that he, whose whole office and ministry were typical, was ordained to instruct us even by his death. In fact, he was himself a comment on his own law: *that* denounced every one "cursed, who continued not in all things that were written in the book of the law to do them;" and he, for one offence, was doomed to die among the unbelieving Israelites, and thereby to shew, that "by the deeds of the law should no flesh be justified[q]."

Let this be remembered by us: the law condemns us as truly for one offence as for a thousand[r]: it is of excellent use to lead us through the wilderness; but it never can bring us into Canaan: and, if ever we would be saved at all, we must trust, not

[h] Heb. iv. 1.
[i] 1 Cor. xi. 32.
[k] 1 Cor. x. 11.
[l] Ezek. xviii. 24.
[m] 1 Cor. x. 12.
[n] 1 Cor. ix. 27.
[o] Ps. cvi 33.
[p] Deut. xxxii. 48—51.
[q] Gal. iii. 10, 16.
[r] Jam. ii. 10.

not in our own obedience to the law, but in Him who fulfilled it, and redeemed us from its curse[s].

Next, it instructs us in *the transitory nature of the ceremonial law*. Before the sentence was to be executed on Aaron, he was to go up to the top of Mount Hor, and there to be stripped of his priestly garments, which Moses was to put upon Eleazar his son[t]. By this transfer of the priesthood it was shewn, that this typical priesthood was not to endure for ever, but to be transferred from one generation to another, till at last it should be superseded by Him, who was to be "a Priest for ever after the order of Melchizedec." This is no fanciful construction: it is the very idea suggested by the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews; who tells us, that the law was disannulled for the weakness and unprofitableness thereof: the priests, its ministers, being unable to continue by reason of death, yielded up their office to "Him who liveth for evermore:" and thus the whole legal economy, not being able to make any one perfect, gave way to that better hope which does[u]. Thus, I say, Aaron's death illustrated the weakness of the ceremonial law, as the death of Moses did that of the moral law. Neither could introduce any one to the land of Canaan; but the one "waxed old and vanished away[x];" and the other remained only to curse and to condemn all who were under its power[y].

The last truth which this dispensation preaches to us is, that *Christ is the appointed Saviour of the world*. Moses and Aaron, being doomed to die in the wilderness, and Miriam having already died at the commencement of this fortieth year, the people were by God's command committed to the care and government of Joshua[z]. *He* was to subdue all their enemies before them, and to put the Israelites into a complete possession of the promised land. Who does not recognise in *him* the Lord Jesus Christ. Their very names are precisely the same in the Greek language: and their offices are the same. Jesus is "the Captain of our salvation:" God has given all his people into *his* hands, that he may give eternal life unto as many as the Father hath given him[a]. Know then, all ye who are going towards the promised land, to whom you must look for direction, support, and victory. Jesus is "given to be a Leader and Commander to his people:" and they who fight under his banners, shall be "more than conquerors." In a word, the moral "law was a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ;" and the ceremonial law was a visible representation to shadow him forth: and in reference to both of them it may be said, "He was the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth[b]."]

To

[s] Rom. viii. 3. & Gal. iii. 13.
[t] ver. 25—28.
[u] Heb. vii. 18, 19, 23, 24.
[x] Heb. viii. 13.
[y] Rom. vii. 10. 2 Cor. iii. 9.
[z] Numb. xxvii. 18—23.
[a] John xvii. 2.
[b] Rom. x. 4.

TO CONCLUDE—

[Let us receive from this history the instruction it was intended to convey. Let us learn from it the excellency of the Gospel, which reveals the Saviour to us; and let us see the importance of adorning it by a suitable conduct and conversation; ever remembering, that to them, and them only, who, by a patient continuance in well doing, seek for glory and honour and immortality, will eternal life be assigned[c].]

[c] Rom. ii. 6, 7.

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## CXVII.

### DEATH OF AARON.

Numb. xx. 27, 28. *And Moses did as the Lord commanded: and they went up into Mount Hor in the sight of all the congregation. And Moses stripped Aaron of his garments, and put them upon Eleazar his son: and Aaron died there in the top of the mount: and Moses and Eleazar came down from the mount.*

THE lapse of time is so gradual and silent, that, for the most part, it escapes our observation: but there are seasons and occurrences[a] which almost irresistibly force upon us the conviction that our days are coming to a close. The history before us is particularly calculated to impress our minds with this thought. It was not till an advanced period of life that Moses and Aaron were called to their sacred office: and when, contrary to their expectation, they were turned back into the wilderness, and doomed to sojourn there during the space of forty years, it would appear as though that time would scarcely ever expire. But years rolled on; the destined period arrived; and death, which had nearly completed its work in the destruction of all the men who had come out of Egypt, received a new commission against those most distinguished servants of the Lord. At the commencement of the fortieth year, Miriam died: before it was half expired, Aaron too was cut off: and, before its termination, Moses himself also was constrained to yield to the stroke of

[a] If this were used as a subject for the *New Year*, or for a *Funeral*, the mention of that particular occasion would be proper.

of death. In the death of Aaron, to which we would now call your attention, there are two things more especially to be noticed;

I. The transfer of his office—

Moses received on order to "strip off Aaron's garments, and to put them on Eleazar his son." That order was now executed: and in the execution of it we may see the true nature of that law, of which Aaron was the chief Minister. We may see,

1. That it could not save—

[In the preceding Discourse we have observed, that the sentence of death passed on Moses, marked the insufficiency of the *moral* law to justify: and now we observe, that the transfer of Aaron's priesthood marked the same respecting the *ceremonial* law. The ceremonial law was never designed to make any *real* satisfaction for sin. The annual repetition of the same sacrifices shewed, that they had not fully prevailed for the removal of guilt. As they could not satisfy divine justice, so neither could they satisfy the consciences of those who offered them: "they were remembrances of sin," calculated to preserve a sense of guilt upon the conscience, and to direct the people to that great sacrifice, which should in due time be offered for the sins of the whole world[b]. This, I say, was shadowed forth in the death of Aaron: for, if those sacrifices which he had offered could really atone for sin, why were they not accepted for *his* sin; or why was not some fresh sacrifice appointed for it? They could not so much as avert from him a temporal punishment, or procure for him an admission into the earthly Canaan: how then could they prevail for the removal of eternal punishment, and for the admission of sinners into the heavenly land? The Apostle tells us, that "it was not possible for the blood of bulls and of goats to take away sin:" nor could a more striking evidence of its inefficiency be conceived, than that which was exhibited in the event before us.]

2. That it was not to continue—

[The sentence of death denounced against Aaron, manifested, as we have before shewn, that the law itself was in due time to be disannulled[c]. The stripping off of Aaron's garments, and putting of them upon Eleazar, still more clearly marked the changeableness of Aaron's priesthood; and intimated, that it should successively devolve on dying men, till HE should arrive, who

[b] Heb. x. 1—4. & ix. 9, 10.

[c] See the preceding Discourse. If this subject were taken alone, that part of it which illustrates this idea should, *in substance*, be introduced in this place.

who should never die, but "be a Priest for ever after the order of Melchizedec."

But the manner in which this transfer was carried into execution deserves particular attention, inasmuch as it was peculiarly calculated to give the people an insight into the whole nature and design of the ceremonial law. Whether the ceremony passed in the sight of all the congregation or not, we cannot say: but they were certainly informed of what was about to take place on the arrival of Moses and Aaron at the destined spot. Now Moses was the person who, by God's appointment, had put the priestly garments on Aaron, forty years before[d]; and he also was the person appointed to strip them off. Was this an accidental circumstance, without any mystical design; Can we suppose that, in a dispensation which was altogether figurative, such a singular fact as this was devoid of meaning? No: it was replete with instruction. We dread exceedingly the indulgence of fancy in interpreting the Scriptures; but we are persuaded that a very deep mystery was shadowed forth on this occasion. Moses was the representative of the law, as Aaron was of our great High Priest. Now it was the law which made any priesthood necessary. If the law had not existed, there had been no transgression: if that had not denounced a curse for sin, there had been no need of an High Priest to make atonement for sin: and if there had been no need of a *real* sacrifice, there had been no occasion for either a priesthood or sacrifices to *shadow* it forth. The law then called forth, if I may so speak, the Lord Jesus Christ to his office: and therefore Moses put the priestly garments on him who was to prefigure Christ. But the same law which rendered a *real* atonement necessary, made the *figurative* priesthood wholly ineffectual: its demands were too high to be satisfied with mere carnal ordinances: there was nothing in a ceremonial observance that could be accepted as a fulfilment of its injunctions; nor was there any thing in the blood of a beast that could compensate for the violation of them: therefore, to shew that nothing but the priesthood and sacrifice of Christ could be of any avail, the same hand that put the shadowy garments upon Aaron must strip them off again.

Thus in this transaction are we taught, not only that the ceremonial law was a mere temporary appointment, but that men should look through it to Him whom it shadowed forth. The language of it was, in effect, similar to that of the Apostle; "I through the law am dead to the law[e];" that is, "I, through the strictness of the moral law, am cut off from all hopes of acceptance with God by any obedience to its commands; yea, I despair of obtaining salvation by any works either of the ceremonial or moral law; and I trust wholly in the Lord Jesus Christ: I seek to be justified solely and altogether by faith in him."]

Whilst

[d] Exod. xxix. 4—7. [e] Gal. ii. 19.

Whilst our minds are instructed by the transfer of Aaron's office to Eleazar his son, our hearts cannot but be affected by,

II. The surrender of his soul—

"The time was come when his spirit must now return unto God who gave it." He goes up to Mount Hor, the appointed place, where he must lay down his mortal body, and from whence he must enter into the presence of his God. In this last scene of his life there is much that is worthy of observation:

1. The occasion was awful—

[Aaron had sinned; and for that sin he must die. We doubt not indeed but that he found mercy before God; but still he died on account of his transgression: his death was the punishment of sin[f]. This, in fact, is true respecting every one that dies: though in some respects death may be numbered among the Christian's treasures, yet in other points of view it must still be regarded as an enemy[g], and a punishment for sin. In this light it must be considered even by the most exalted Christian, no less than by the most ungodly; "his body is dead because of sin, even though his spirit be life because of righteousness[h]."

But in the death of this eminent saint we have a most instructive lesson. It was doubtless intended as a warning to all who profess themselves the servants of God. Like Lot's wife, it speaks to all succeeding generations, and declares the danger of departing from God. No length of services will avail us any thing, if at last we yield to temptation, and "fall from our own stedfastness[i]." The death of Aaron shadowed forth that truth which is plainly declared by the prophet Ezekiel, that "if a righteous man turn away from his righteousness and commit iniquity, all his righteousness that he hath done shall not be mentioned; but in his trespass that he hath trespassed, and in his sin that he hath sinned, in them shall he die[k]." Many there are, who, from an attachment to human systems and a zeal for truths of an apparently opposite nature, would almost expunge this passage from the sacred volume: but, whether we can reconcile it with other passages or not, it is true; and every one of us shall find it true at last, that not he who runneth well for a season, but "he who endureth unto the end, shall be saved[l]."]

2. The manner [was] dignified—

[Methinks I see Aaron, accompanied by Moses and Eleazar, going up to Mount Hor "in the sight of all the congregation:" there is in him no appearance of infidel hardness, or unbelieving fear, or pharisaic confidence: he acquiesces in the divine appointment,

[f] ver. 24. [g] 1 Cor. xv. 26. [h] Rom. viii. 10.
[i] 1 Pet. iii. 17. [k] Ezek. xviii. 24. [l] Matt. xxiv. 13.

ment, and, with meek composure, a firm step, and a cheerful countenance, ascends to meet his God. Thrice happy man! how enviable his state, to be so attended, and to be so assured! What can a saint desire more than this; to have his pious relatives about him; to see, not only those with whom he has moved in sweet harmony for many years, and who are soon to follow him into the eternal world, but his children also, who are coming forward to fill the offices he vacates, and to serve the Lord as he has done before them; to see them around him, I say, in his last hours; to enjoy their prayers; and to bestow on them his parting benedictions? How delightful, in that hour, to "know in whom he has believed," and to be assured that he is "entering into the joy of his Lord!" Such *may* be the state of all; such *ought* to be the state of all. Hear how Peter speaks of his death: "I know that I must shortly put off this my tabernacle[m]." Hear Paul also speaking of his: "I know that when the earthly house of this tabernacle shall be dissolved, I have an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens:" "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith; henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me[n]." Shall it be said, These were Apostles; and we must not expect such attainments as theirs? I answer, These things are the privilege of all: "Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright; for the end of that man is peace[o]."]

3. The event [was] honourable—

[Upon every recurrence of difficulties, the whole people of Israel had vented their spleen against Moses and against Aaron. On some occasions they had been ready to stone these distinguished servants of the Lord. But now that Aaron was taken from them, the whole congregation of Israel bemoaned their loss[p]. Now they call to mind those services, which once they despised. Now they say one to another, "How often have we seen him fall on his face before God, to implore mercy for us, at the very moment when we were murmuring against him as the source of all our troubles! How did we on a recent occasion see him rushing with his censer into the midst of the plague, to arrest the pestilence in its progress, even at the peril of his own life! Alas, alas, what a friend and father have we lost!" Yes; thus it too generally is; men know their blessings only by the loss of them. They enjoy a faithful ministry, but will not avail themselves of it, till "the candlestick is removed," and the privileges, which they have slighted, are withdrawn. The same is too often experienced by children who have neglected the admonitions of their parents, and servants who have disregarded the instructions of their masters. Happy they, who "know the day of their visitation," and "walk in the light before the night cometh!" To those

[m] 2 Pet. i. 14. [n] 2 Cor. v. 1. 2 Tim. iv. 8.
[o] Ps. xxxvii. 37. [p] ver. 29.

those indeed who die, it is comforting to know that they shall leave such a testimony behind them: but, when we consider the augmented guilt and misery of those who have slighted our admonitions, our sorrow for them preponderates, and turns our self-congratulations into tender sympathy and grief: for the greater our exertions were for their salvation, the more certainly shall we appear as swift witnesses against them, to increase and aggravate their condemnation.]

ADDRESS—

What if God were now to issue the command to any one of us, "Go up to thy bed, and die?" how would it be received amongst us? Should we welcome such an order? Should we rejoice that the period was arrived for our dismission from the body, and for our entrance into the presence of our God? Such an order will assuredly be soon given to every one of us: the old and the young, the rich and the poor, those who have travelled all through the wilderness, and those who have but just entered into it, may have it said to them within a few hours, "This night is thy soul required of thee." But, however men might receive the summons, its consequences to them would be widely different, according as they were prepared, or unprepared, to meet their God. Think,

1st. Thou who art regardless of thine eternal state—

[Thou art now perhaps adorned in costly array, and filling some high station; perhaps, if not crowned with a mitre, like Aaron, at least officiating at the altar of thy God. But thine honours and thine ornaments must all be laid aside; and thine office, together with thy wealth, must be transferred to others. "Naked camest thou into the world, and naked must thou go from it." But whither must thou go? To heaven? Alas! persons of your description can find no admittance there. Thou wilt be excluded, like the foolish virgins, who had no oil in their lamps. O think, from what thou wilt be excluded: not from an earthly Canaan, but from heaven itself; and not, to be merely bereaved of good, but to bewail thy misery in hell for ever! Ah! fearful thought! The Lord grant that it may sink down into all our hearts, and stir us up to "flee from the wrath to come!"

Do any inquire, What shall we do to be saved? My answer is, There is an High Priest, who dieth not; or rather, I should say, who, though once he died on Mount Calvary, now "liveth, and

and behold he is alive for evermore." It is to him that Moses directed you when he stripped off Aaron's robes; and to him Aaron himself directed you, when he surrendered up his soul. The typical priests being inefficient, "were not suffered to continue by reason of death: but the Lord Jesus hath an unchangeable priesthood; and is therefore able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth[q]." Believe in him, and the sting of death shall be removed: thou shalt have peace with God through his atoning blood; and, when taken hence, shalt be transported on the wings of angels to Abraham's bosom.]

2. Thou who professest religion, yet art living at a distance from thy God—

[Let us suppose for a moment, thou art not so far from God, but that thou shalt find mercy at his hands in the last day: still it would be very painful to die under a cloud, and to leave thy surviving friends doubtful of thy state. Yet this is the best that thou canst expect, whilst thou art relaxing thy diligence, and "the things which remain in thee are ready to die." But there is reason to fear that thou art "drawing back unto perdition," and that "thy last end will be worse than thy beginning." Think not that this is an uncommon case: there are many who "seem to be religious, and yet deceive their own souls." How terrible then will be your disappointment, if, after walking, perhaps twenty, or, like Aaron, forty years, in expectation of reaching the promised land, you come short of it at last! Yet this will be the case with all who dissemble with God[r]. When your Minister, who had hoped that you would have been "his joy and crown of rejoicing" for ever, shall inquire, "Where is he?" and your dearest friends also shall ask, "Where is he?" how painful will it be, and perhaps surprising too, to be informed, that you were counted unworthy of that heavenly kingdom[s]! The Lord grant that this picture may never be realized with respect to any of *you!* But I *must* caution you in the words of the Apostle; "Let us fear, lest a promise being left us of entering into God's rest, any of you should seem to come short of it[t]."]

3. Thou sincere and upright Christian—

[What a glorious change will it be to thee, when God shall bid thee to go up unto thy bed and die! Whatever honours thou possessest here, thou needest feel no regret at parting with them. Thou hast found thy trials in this wilderness great and manifold: and happy mayest thou be to go unto the rest that remaineth for thee. Thou hast no need to be afraid of death: it should be regarded only as the stripping off of thy garments, to retire to rest; or rather, as the being "unclothed, in order to be clothed upon,

[q] Heb. vii. 23—25. [r] Job xx. 4—7. [s] ib. ver. 7. [t] Heb. iv. 1.

upon, that mortality may be swallowed up of life[u]." Go forward then in daily expectation of thy summons: yea, be daily "looking for, and hasting unto, the coming of that blessed day[x]," when thou shalt "depart, and be with Christ for ever." Who can conceive the bliss that awaits thee at that hour? To behold Him, "of whom the Law and the Prophets testified," and in whom their testimony received its full accomplishment! To behold Him whom Aaron's love and services but faintly shadowed! Him, "the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person!" Were death a thousand times more terrible than it is, it were eagerly to be coveted as an introduction to such bliss. Methinks, impatience were a virtue with such prospects as these: or if you must wait with patience your appointed time, endeavour at least so to live, that, at whatever hour your Lord may come, you may be found ready, and have "an abundant entrance into the kingdom of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ[y]."]

[u] 2 Cor. v. 4. [x] 2 Pet. iii. 12. [y] 2 Pet. i. 11.

## CXVIII.

### THE ISRAELITES DISCOURAGED BY THE WAY.

Numb. xxi. 4. *And the soul of the people was much discouraged because of the way.*

THE history of human nature is nearly the same in all ages. Successive generations ought progressively to advance in wisdom, because they have the advantage of others' experience. But youth will not avail themselves of the instructions of their forefathers: they will go forward in their own ways; exactly as if they had no compass whereby to steer, nor any chart of the rocks and shoals, on which so so many thousands have been shipwrecked. "The way of their predecessors has been folly; and yet their posterity, in practice at least, applaud their saying." A new generation had been born in the wilderness since the departure of the Israelites from the land of Egypt; and they had ample means of information respecting the rebellious conduct of their fathers, and the chastisements inflicted on account of it: yet on similar occasions they constantly acted in a similar manner, murmuring and complaining as soon as any new trial arose, and wishing themselves dead, to get rid of their present troubles. Thus it

was

was with them at this time. We propose to inquire into,

I. The causes of their discouragement—

Doubtless, to those who could not implicitly confide in the wisdom and goodness of God, there was ground for discouragement. There was,

1. A perplexing providence—

[The period fixed for their entrance into Canaan was nearly arrived. They had just had a severe engagement with one of the Canaanitish kings, who had come forth against them with all his forces; and, after suffering a partial defeat, had entirely vanquished him. But they were not suffered to follow up their success, or to proceed to the immediate invasion of his land. On the contrary, having been refused permission to pass through the territories of the king of Edom, they were directed to "compass his whole land, and to go back to the Red Sea," perhaps as far as to Ezion-gaber[a]. This was after they had been thirty-nine years and six months in the wilderness; after two of their leaders, Miriam and Aaron, were taken from them by death; and when there remained but six months to the time fixed for their entrance into the promised land. How unaccountable did this appear! Must they wait to be attacked in the wilderness, and never be permitted to reap the reward of victory? Must they wait in the wilderness till their enemies should be willing to resign their land? Had God forgotten his promise, or determined that they should spend another forty years in the wilderness? If the promise was to be fulfilled, why give them the trouble of traversing the wilderness again? If it was not to be fulfilled, they had better die at once, than protract a miserable existence under such vexatious and cruel disappointments.

Whilst they viewed the dispensation in this light, we do not wonder that "their soul was much discouraged."

In truth, this is a very common source of discouragement to ourselves. Persons, on their first commencement of their journey heaven-ward, are apt to be sanguine, and to expect that they shall speedily arrive at the promised land. At one time they seem near it, but are turned back again, in order that, by a long course of trials, they may be better prepared to enjoy it. At another time they seem almost to possess it; and then, not long after, find themselves at a greater distance from it than ever. Thus "hope deferred maketh their heart sick:" and being disappointed in their expectations, they yield to great dejection of mind: "If I am not of the number of God's people, whence have I these desires? if I am, why have I not those attainments?"

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[a] Deut. ii. 8.

The same disquietude arises from perplexities of any kind, where the promise and the providence of God appear at variance with each other. Not being able to account for the Lord's dealings towards them, "their souls are cast down, and greatly disquieted within them."]

2. A long-protracted trial—

[Forty years of trial was a long period: and the nearer they came to its completion, the longer every day appeared. Hence this fresh order to go back to the Red Sea, and there to recommence their travels, quite overwhelmed them.

And how do long-continued afflictions operate on us? For a season we can bear up under them: but when pains of body, or distress of mind, are lengthened out; when the clouds, instead of dispersing, thicken, and storms of trouble are gathering all around us; then patience is apt to fail, and the mind sinks under its accumulated trials. Because "our strength is small, we faint under our adversity." Even Job, that bright pattern of patience, who after the heaviest losses could say, "The Lord gave and the Lord taketh away, blessed be the name of the Lord;" even he, I say, fainted at last, and cursed the day of his birth. And he must be endued with an uncommon measure of grace, who under such circumstances can say with Paul, "None of these things move me."]

That we may see how their discouragement operated, let us consider,

II. The effects produced by it—

Their minds being discomposed, they immediately gave way to,

1. A dissatisfied spirit—

[Many were the blessings which they received from the hand of God: they lived by a continual miracle: they were provided with water out of a rock, and with manna daily from the clouds: and yet they complain, "There is no bread, neither is there any water: and our soul loatheth this light bread." Because they did not partake of that variety which the nations around them enjoyed, they were discontented: or rather, because they were offended with the order to go back unto the Red Sea, they were displeased with every thing.

What a picture is this of human frailty! The mind discouraged on one account, looks not out for circumstances of alleviation and comfort, but gives itself up to disquietude and dejection. Temporal blessings lose all their relish. Let even the bread of life be administered to persons in such a frame, they can taste no sweetness in it; the promises of God seem not suited to their case; nor are they sufficient for their support. They "cannot hear the voice of the charmer, charm he never so wisely." If they

they even turn their minds to the right object, it is only to confirm their own doubts, and to augment their own sorrows. Their experience is like that of Asaph, "My sore ran in the night, and ceased not; my soul refused to be comforted: I remembered God, and was troubled[b]."]

2. A murmuring spirit—

[How lamentable to hear them on this occasion accusing God and his servant Moses of having brought them out of Egypt with a view to deceive their expectations and to kill them in the wilderness! But the mind, once thrown off its bias, will stop short of nothing, unless it be restrained by the grace of God[c]. Let any one that has been in deep affliction, look back and see, whether he has not found his mind rise against the immediate authors of his calamities, and ultimately against God himself, for having appointed him so hard a lot[d]? It is true, we do not perhaps *intend* to accuse God; but we do it in effect; because, whoever be the instrument, it is *his* hand that smites. Whether Chaldeans or Sabeans invaded the property of Job, or tempests destroyed his family, the holy sufferer referred the events to God, as their true author. Without God, not a hair of our head could be touched, even if the whole world were confederate against us: when therefore we murmur at the calamities we suffer, we murmur in reality against him who sends them.]

It may be asked perhaps, How could they help yielding to this discouragement? That they might have done so, will appear, whilst we shew,

III. The way in which they should have fortified themselves against it—

It behoved them in this trouble, as indeed in every other, to consider,

1. Whence it came—

[It did not spring out of the dust; it came from God; even from him who had brought them out of Egypt, and had supported them to that very hour. Had they not had evidence enough of God's power and goodness during the nine and thirty years that they had continued in the wilderness? and did it not become them to place their confidence in him, though they could not see the immediate reason of his dispensations?

Thus should we do, when tempted to disquietude and despondency: we should say, "It is the Lord; let him do what seemeth him good:" "the cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?" Yes; "when walking in darkness, we should stay ourselves upon our God;" and determine with Job, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him." This was the expedient

[b] Ps. lxxvii. 2, 3. [c] Isai. viii. 21, 22. [d] Prov. xix. 3.

expedient to which David resorted in the midst of all his troubles, and which he found effectual to compose his mind; "he encouraged himself in the Lord his God[e]."]

2. For what end it was sent—

[God has expressly stated the end for which he tried them so long in the wilderness: it was, "to humble them, and to prove them, that they might know what was in their hearts[f]." And was not the prospect of such an end sufficient to reconcile them to the means used for the attainment of it? Let us also consider the ends for which our afflictions are sent: are they not sent with a view to make us "partakers of his holiness?" Who would be discouraged at his trials, if he reflected on the necessity which there is for them, and the blessed fruit that shall spring from them? Doubtless, they are "not joyous for the present, but grievous:" nevertheless the refiner's fire may well be endured, if only it purge us from our dross, and make us, as "vessels of honour, meet for our Master's use."]

3. The certain issue of it, if duly improved—

[They were well assured that God would fulfil his promises. Even their recent victory over the Canaanites was a pledge and earnest of their future conquests. What if they did not understand the way of the Lord? The direction they had taken at their first departure from Egypt had appeared to their fathers to be erroneous: but it had proved "the right way;" and they should have been satisfied, that this, though alike mysterious, would have a similar issue; and that the number and greatness of their trials would ultimately redound to the glory of their God, and to their own real happiness.

Thus we should bear in mind that all our afflictions are working together for good, and that, "light and momentary in themselves, they are working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." Did we but consider this, we should be content to suffer, till we had filled up our appointed measure; yea, we should even "glory in our tribulations," knowing that we are to be "made perfect by them," and that "they are our appointed way to the kingdom of heaven."]

APPLICATION—

[Certain it is that "we have need of patience, in order that, when we have done the will of God, we may inherit the promises." But let not any of the sons and daughters of affliction yield to discouragement. If their trials be great, their supports and consolations shall be great also. Are they particularly discouraged at the thought of their weakness and sinfulness? let them recollect, what a fulness of merit and of grace is treasured up for them in Jesus; that "where sin has abounded, his grace shall much more abound; and that his strength shall surely be perfected in their weakness."]

[e] 1 Sam. xxx. 6. with Ps. xlii. 11. [f] Deut. viii. 2.

## CXIX.

### THE BRAZEN SERPENT.

Numb. xxi. 8, 9. *And the Lord said unto Moses, Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole: and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live. And Moses made a serpent of brass, and put it upon a pole: and it came to pass, that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived.*

IT is said in Scripture, that, "where sin hath abounded, grace shall much more abound." This declaration, if received as a licence for sin, would be pernicious in the extreme: but, if taken as an encouragement to repent, its tendency is most consolatory and beneficial. That God has magnified his grace towards the most unworthy of men, and even taken occasion from their wickedness to display the unbounded extent of his own mercy, is certain: we need only read the history of the Israelites in the wilderness, and we shall be fully convinced of this. Their conduct was most perverse. They were truly a stiff-necked people. Notwithstanding all their experience of God's kindness towards them, they could never confide in him, but were always murmuring, and always rebelling. By their wickedness they brought down upon themselves the divine judgments; but no sooner did they implore forgiveness, than God returned to them in mercy, and put away his judgments far from them. We have a very singular instance of this in the history before us; where we are informed, that God had, on account of their murmurings, sent fiery flying serpents to destroy them; but, on the intercession of Moses, had appointed them an easy remedy, by the use of which their wounds were healed, and their calamities removed.

We propose to consider,

I. The appointment itself—

The need of God's interposition was exceeding urgent—

[The wilderness abounded with serpents, such as the camp was

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was now infested with[a]. They were of a very malignant nature, causing by their bite a fatal inflammation[b]. Multitudes of the people had been bitten by them: many were dying; and many were already dead. In vain did any of them seek an antidote against the venom, with which they were in hourly expectation of being infected: nor could any means be devised to abate its force. What then could the people do? To arm themselves against the danger, was impossible: they were assailable on every side: the serpents being winged, their assaults were irresistible. In this extremity, they apply themselves to him, who alone was able to deliver. They humble themselves before their God; and they intreat Moses to intercede for them. If God have not mercy on them, they must all perish. Such was the extremity to which they were reduced.]

But the manner in which he interposed was strange and unaccountable—

[God ordered a serpent to be made of brass, as like as possible to those which bit the people: and that serpent he commanded to be erected on a pole, in order that the wounded persons might look unto it and be healed. But what connexion was there between the means and the end? Of what use could a piece of brass be, or what could it signify of what shape it was? Of what service could it be to look upon it? If it were used in a way of friction; or if it were reduced to powder and swallowed; or any mixture were made with an infusion of brass in it; one might suppose it possible that such a prescription might be of some use: there might be some affinity between the remedy and the disease: but, when such an order as that in our text was given, it seemed rather as if God were only "laughing at their calamity, and mocking, now that their fear was come."]

Strange however as this might appear at the time, the reason of it is clear to us, who know,

II. The mystery contained in it—

That the deepest mysteries of our holy religion were shadowed forth by it, we are well assured, because our blessed Lord has expressly referred to it as illustrative and explanatory of them. Let us, for distinctness sake, consider,

1. The provision made—

[God ordered that a brazen serpent should be made like unto the other serpents, (but without their venom;) and that it should be

[a] Deut. viii. 15.

[b] They are probably called "fiery" on *this* account, rather than from their colour.

be erected on a pole in the midst of the camp. And herein was a great mystery. What, I would ask, is the provision which God has made for the recovery of a ruined world? Has he not sent his only dear Son into the world, to be made "in the likeness of sinful flesh," yea, to be "made in all things like unto us, sin only excepted[c]?" Has he not caused that glorious person to be suspended on a cross, and to yield up his own life a sacrifice for sin? Has he not moreover commanded that in every place, and in every age, that adorable Saviour should, by the preaching of the everlasting Gospel, be "evidently set forth crucified before the eyes of men[d]?" Here then we behold that which was prefigured by the brazen serpent. In affirming this, we speak only what our Lord himself has declared[e]. Indeed on several different occasions did he refer to this type, as to receive in due season its accomplishment in him[f]. O how are we indebted to God for the light of his blessed Gospel! Little did the Israelites know what a stupendous mercy was here exhibited to their view. Doubtless, as a mere ordinance for the healing of their bodies, they would be thankful for it; but how thankful should *we* be, who see in it such a wonderful provision for our souls! Let us contemplate it: God's co-equal, co-eternal Son, Jehovah's Fellow, made incarnate! The Deity himself assuming our nature with all its sinless infirmities, and dying an accursed death upon the cross! and this too for the salvation of his own rebellious creatures! O let us never for one moment forget, that this is the means which God has appointed for our deliverance from death and hell: let us contemplate it, till our hearts are altogether absorbed in wonder, love, and praise.]

2. The direction given—

[The only thing which the Israelites had to do, was, to *look* unto the brazen serpent. There was nothing else required of them: they were not first to heal themselves in part; or to apply any other remedy in conjunction with this: nor were they to do any thing either to merit, or to increase its efficacy: they were simply to look unto the serpent, as God's ordinance for their recovery. Here then we behold a further mystery. Never from the foundation of the world was the way of salvation more plainly, more fully, or more intelligibly declared, than in this simple method of obtaining the desired blessing. Salvation is only and entirely by faith in Christ. The direction which Christ himself gives us by the prophet Isaiah, is this: "*Look* unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is none else[g]." And when he sent forth his Disciples to preach his Gospel, he especially charged them to declare, that "he who believed,

[c] Rom. viii. 3. with Heb. ii. 17. & iv. 15.
[d] Gal. iii. 1. [e] John iii. 14. [f] John viii. 28. & xii. 32.
[g] Isai. xlv. 22.

believed, should be saved; and he who believed not, should be damned[i]." Many other things indeed he requires of his people: he requires that they should *repent*, in order to evince that they truly desire mercy; and that they should *obey*, in order to manifest that they have obtained mercy: but both their repentance and obedience are carefully excluded from the office of justifying: justification is invariably declared to be by faith alone. "It is by faith in order that it may be by grace[k]:" and, when we have learned how much the Israelites did for the healing of their bodies, then we shall know how much our own works are to procure the healing of our souls. In this view the type before us is singularly instructive: it is so plain, that it is obvious to the meanest apprehension; so comprehensive, that nothing can be added for the elucidation of it; and so authenticated, that scepticism itself cannot doubt either its reference or its accomplishment.]

3. The effect produced—

[If any despised the remedy, they died: whereas not a single instance occurred, throughout all the camp of Israel, of any person resorting to it in vain. However desperate his state was, however distant he might be from the serpent, or however indistinctly he beheld it, the effect was still the same; every person who looked to it as God's ordinance for the healing of his wounds, was healed by it; he was healed immediately, and he was healed perfectly. The man that can see no mystery here, is blind indeed. We may defy the ingenuity of men or angels to devise any means whereby the efficacy of faith in Christ should be more clearly ascertained. Plain indeed is that declaration of St. Paul, "All that believe, are justified from all things[l]:" but, plain as it is, it does not so forcibly strike the mind, as does the typical representation in our text. All the questions that can arise respecting the nature and the efficacy of faith, are here distinctly answered. If suppositions are made which can never be verified, no wonder if difficulties occur which cannot be solved: but let us only remember, that faith is a looking to Christ for salvation, and that *that* faith is uniformly and universally productive of good works; and then we can no more doubt its efficacy to save the soul, than we can doubt the veracity of God. We inquire not, whether that faith be strong or weak; (though doubtless the stronger it is, the more abundant will be its fruits:) we only ask, whether it be genuine and unfeigned; and then we do not hesitate to affirm, that the possessor of it "shall be saved:" "he shall not be ashamed or confounded world without end[m]."]

ADDRESS—

[i] Mark xvi. 16.
[k] John iii. 15. with Rom. iv. 16. & xi. 6. & Eph. ii. 8, 9.
[l] Acts xiii. 39. [m] Acts xvi. 31. with Isai. xlv. 17.

ADDRESS—

1. Those who are averse to this method of salvation—

[Many there are to whom the doctrine of salvation by faith alone is an object of disgust. It was so in the first ages of Christianity; and it is so still to the greater part of the Christian world. But though the cross of Christ is still, as formerly, "to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness," yet is it at this time, as it was then, "the power of God and the wisdom of God[n]." If it be objected, that to be saved by faith alone, and by faith in One who saved not himself, appears absurd; we answer, That such an objection might with just as much reason have been urged against the healing of dying men by the sight of a brazen serpent: and that it is not for us to prescribe to God in what way he shall save a ruined world. It is not for us to dictate, but obey. Were there therefore really as little connexion between the means and the end in the Gospel salvation, as there was in the typical representation of it, it would still be our duty thankfully to submit to the remedy proposed. But this is not the case: it would be easy to shew that there is a wonderful suitableness between the death of Christ as an atonement for sin, and the mercy vouchsafed to us for his sake: nor is there a less suitableness between our exercise of faith in him, and his communication of grace to us. But without entering into that discussion at present, we refer to the type as decisive of the point. "Wash and be clean," was said to Naaman; "Look and be healed," to Israel; "Believe and be saved," to us. This is Christ's message to a guilty world; and "blessed is he who shall not be offended in him."]

2. Those who have experienced its saving benefits—

[The brazen serpent was carried by the Israelites throughout all the remainder of their journey: and, if they had been bitten again by the fiery serpents, they would doubtless have had recourse again to the remedy, which they had once found to be effectual. The need of repeated applications to *our* remedy is daily recurring; and, thanks be to God! its efficacy is undiminished. To all therefore would we repeat the direction before given, "Look unto Christ and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth." If those around you doubt, as certainly they will doubt, the efficacy of faith, let them read it in your whole conduct: let them see that your corruptions are mortified, and your evil dispositions are healed. Let them see that there is a difference between you and those around you, and such a difference too, as nothing but faith in Christ can produce. They will be boasting of other remedies, which, in spite of their utmost exertions, they will

[n] 1 Cor. i. 23, 24.

will find ineffectual: but let them see in you the superior excellence of *that*, which God has revealed in his Gospel. Declare to them the way of life: exalt the Lord Jesus in their eyes: commend him to them with your lips; but most of all commend him to them in your lives. In a word, let your whole conversation be a visible comment on those words of the Apostle, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ; by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world[o]."]

[o] Gal. vi. 14.

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## CXX.

### BALAAM'S CHARACTER.

Numb. xxii. 18, 19. *And Balaam answered and said unto the servants of Balak, If Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold, I cannot go beyond the word of the Lord my God, to do less or more. Now therefore, I pray you, tarry ye also here this night, that I may know what the Lord will say unto me more.*

THE study of human nature is ever profitable. Much insight into it may be gained from history; much from converse with the world; much from the examination of our own hearts. But that which we acquire from a perusal of the holy Scriptures is the most clear and certain, because we have all the circumstances in one view before our eyes, and have infallible information respecting the motives and principles by which the different agents were influenced. The character of Balaam is peculiarly instructive. He was a man eminent as a soothsayer: and it was supposed that he could influence the fate, not of individuals only, but of nations, by his sentence of blessing or malediction. Persons of his description were frequently employed by kings at the commencement of a war, to devote their enemies to destruction: and, among the Romans, an officer was appointed particularly to that office. This man was applied to by Balak, the king of Moab, to come and curse Israel; who, as they feared, would vanquish them all, as easily "as an ox licketh up the grass." This message gave occasion to

Balaam

Balaam to display what was in his heart. We propose to shew you,

I. The inconsistency of Balaam's character—

That we may have a more distinct view of his character, we shall notice the contrariety which there was,

1. Between his sentiments and desires—

[The desires of man by nature are altogether earthly and sensual: but when light breaks in upon his mind, and he is made to see in a measure the evil of such desires, a conflict begins within him. It is in this state that multitudes go on: they see the better path, and approve it in their minds; but they cannot, will not, follow it: there are some gratifications which they know not how to forego, some interests which they cannot prevail upon themselves to give up; and hence they proceed in a painful opposition to the dictates of their own consciences, being habitually self-convicted and self-condemned. They "hate the light," and, as the Scripture strongly expresses it, "rebel against the light."

Such was the state of Balaam. His views of divine truth were very enlarged, when we consider the age and country in which he lived. He had a considerable knowledge of God and his perfections; yea, of Christ also, together with the kingdom which he should establish upon earth[a]. He was acquainted with the nature of truly spiritual religion[aa]; and saw, not only the certainty of a future state, but the certainty, that, in that state, there would be an inconceivable difference between the righteous and the wicked. But still he was a covetous, and ambitious man: and as soon as a prospect of gratifying his evil propensities was opened to him, he bore down the better convictions of his own mind, and determinately set himself to do evil.]

2. Between his professions and conduct—

[Who that heard all the fine speeches which he made repecting his determination to adhere to the will of God, even though he should be able to gain "an house full of silver and gold" by disobeying it; and his pious advice to Balak, "to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with God;" who that had seen him apparently so fearful of stirring a step, or speaking a word, without the divine counsel and direction, would not have conceived him to be a pious character? Yet from beginning to the end his conduct was a continued course of horrible impiety. After he had once consulted God, and had received from him a determined answer that "he should *not* go with the messengers, and that he should *not* curse Israel, for that they were, and should be, blessed;" what had he to do, but to dismiss

[a] Numb. xxiv. 17—19. [aa] Mic. vi. 6—8.

dismiss the messengers with a plain, full, determined answer? When the second company of ambassadors came, he should not have listened to them a moment; but should have been as peremptory in his answer to them as to the former. His second application for direction was only an insult to the Divine Majesty, and a spreading of a net for his own feet. God, seeing how bent he was upon the attainment of his own ends, (the acquisition of wealth and honour,) no more interposed with authority to prevent him, but on certain conditions gave him a permission to go. No sooner was a *conditional* permission given, than Balaam, without waiting for the conditions, set out upon his journey. God, in mercy to him, interposed by a miracle to obstruct his way; and caused a dumb ass to reprove him[b]: but even this produced nothing more than a momentary conviction of his sin, which however he was still determined to persist in: and, having obtained from the Angel, what he construed into a permission to proceed, but which was rather a declaration that the ends of his journey should be defeated; (for that he should not be permitted to speak any thing which was not put into his mouth by God himself;) onward he goes, and addresses himself to his impious work with activity and perseverance. In all his renewed endeavours to curse Israel, he found himself constrained to bless them, insomuch that Balak, furiously enraged against him, dismissed him without any of the riches or honours which he had so eagerly sought after. *Now*, it might be hoped, that Balaam at last should see his error, and humble himself for his iniquity. But, instead of this, he devised a plan whereby that people, who could not be subdued by arms, might be beguiled into sin, and thereby subjected to the displeasure of their Almighty Protector. He advised Balak to make use of the Midianitish women, first to allure them to fornication, and then to draw them to idolatry; and by this means to destroy the *souls* of those, whom he could not otherwise injure[c]. Now compare this with all his professions of reverence for God, of regard for holiness, and of a desire after everlasting happiness; and what an astonishing inconsistency will appear!

But, in truth, though his *circumstances* were peculiar, his *state* is common. Many, many are the people, who, amidst high professions of regard for religion, are as much actuated by love of wealth and honour as ever Balaam was; and, if they can only obtain their own *ends*, are as little scrupulous as he about the *means*. Such are they who resemble the ancient Pharisees, on the one hand; and such also are the descendants of Judas

[b] ver. 22—34. with 2 Pet. ii. 16.

[c] Compare Numb. xxxi. 16. with Rev. ii. 14.

Judas and of Demas, on the other hand. Such characters abounded even in the Apostolic age[d]: and we must not wonder, if they be to be found also in the present day[e].]

In the course of this history, whilst we mark the inconsistency of Balaam, we cannot but notice also,

II. The consequences resulting from it—

Let us attend to those which resulted,

1. To his employers—

[Balak had raised his expectations high, and had hoped to derive great advantage from the aid of Balaam: "I know that he whom thou blessest, is blessed; and he whom thou cursest, is cursed." But, after all his expense and trouble, he found that he had trusted to a broken reed; and was constrained to dismiss with indignation the man, whom he had so anxiously endeavoured to interest in his favour.

What a picture does this afford us of the disappointment too often generated in the minds of men by hypocritical professors! One perhaps, having heard of the religious principles of such or such a servant, promises himself the highest satisfaction in connexion with him: but finds him, after all, conceited, idle, deceitful, disobedient. Another deals with such or such a tradesman, in expectation that he shall find in him the integrity suited to his religious professions: but soon learns, that others, who know nothing of religion, are more honourable, and more to be depended on, than he. Another contracts a matrimonial alliance, from the presumption, that the person's sentiments will have a suitable influence on his conduct: but learns afterwards, by bitter experience, that asperities of temper, and imprudences of conduct, even such as any *moral* person would be ashamed of, are too often cloked under a garb of religion, and gratified, to the utter subversion of domestic happiness. Need we say, what a stab such conduct gives to religion, or what a stumbling-block it lays in the way of the ungodly? Truly, through such persons "the way of truth is evil spoken of," the prejudices of thousands are confirmed, and the name of our God and Saviour is blasphemed.]

2. To Israel—

[Though the enchantments of Balaam were unavailing, his diabolical advice was too successful: the Israelites, unable to resist the allurements of the Midianitish women, were betrayed into an unlawful commerce with them; and thus fell into the snare which Balak laid for them, and brought upon themselves the heavy displeasure of their God.

And are not hypocritical professors a snare to many? Do they

[d] See 2 Pet. ii. 14, 15. with Rev. iii. 1. & former part of v. 9.

[e] Ezek. xxxiii. 31.

they not, either, by a spirit of disputation, turn weak believers "from the simplicity of the Gospel;" or, by a spirit of licentiousness, (which *they* call liberty,) induce them to violate their own consciences? Multitudes of such professors there have been, and yet are, in the Christian Church; nor will it ever be known till the day of judgment, how many "weak brethren, for whom Christ died, have perished" through their means[f].]

3. To himself—

[It might have been hoped, that after having been constrained to bless Israel, and thus to lose "the rewards of divination" which he coveted, he would have seen "his error," and repented of it. But *this* is very rarely the lot of those, who proceed for any time in a wilful opposition to the convictions of their own minds: they generally become "seared in their consciences," and hardened in their sins. Thus it was with Balaam. Though foiled for the present in his hopes of gain, he would not relinquish his pursuit of it, but still continued among the Midianites, and soon afterwards was involved in their destruction[g].

What a lesson does this teach us! What a prospect does it afford to all who yield themselves to the dominion of an unhallowed appetite! How vain his wish to have "his end like that of the righteous," when he would not resemble them in his life! And truly, if we follow his steps, we shall, like him, perish miserably at last among the enemies of God.]

LEARN then from this history,

1. The danger of indulging any besetting sin—

[The sin of Balaam was covetousness: and we see how it hurried him from one iniquity to another, till it brought him finally to destruction, both of body and soul. Nor is this an uncommon case. There is scarcely any principle, more common, or more destructive, than a desire after wealth and preferment. "The love of money," says the Apostle, "is the root of all evil: and many, by coveting after it, have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows[h]." The facility with which men deceive themselves in relation to this principle, renders it peculiarly dangerous. It scarcely ever appears in any other light than as a venial, at least, if not a commendable, quality. It is likely that Balaam himself did not see the extent of his own iniquity: he probably conceived himself to be solicitous only to know and do the will of God. But an inspired Apostle says of him, that "he loved the wages of unrighteousness," and "ran *greedily* after error for reward." Beware then, Brethren, lest, whilst ye think yourselves only prudent and discreet, God himself should "choose your delusions," "give you

[f] 1 Cor. viii. 9—12.
[g] Numb. xxxi. 8. Josh. xiii. 22.
[h] 1 Tim. vi. 9, 10.

you up to a reprobate mind," impute the same iniquity to you, and assign you your doom amongst his enemies. Whatever excites in you even a wish to violate the commands of God, will, if not restrained and mortified, assuredly "drown you in destruction and perdition."]

2. The necessity of acting conformably with our principles and professions—

[Happy would it have been for Balaam, if he had so done! But of what use was his knowledge of God, whom he did not fear; or his views of Christ, whom he did not love? Of what benefit was his knowledge of men's duty, when he would not practise it; or his persuasion of a future judgment, for which he made no exertions to prepare? These things served only to enhance his guilt, and to aggravate his condemnation. Thus will it be with us: "it were better never to have known any thing of the way of righteousness, than to" oppose it, or "depart from it." "The servant that knew his Lord's will and did it not, shall be beaten with more stripes, than the servant who sinned through ignorance." I would earnestly intreat you therefore, Brethren, to walk according to the light which you possess. Do not, like Balaam, "imprison the truth in unrighteousness:" do not "profess that you know God, and at the same time in your works deny him:" but rather be yourselves examples unto others, that they may in you behold the sanctifying efficacy of your faith, and the excellency of that religion you profess.]

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## CXXI.

### BALAAM OBSTRUCTED BY THE ANGEL.

Numb. xxii. 31. *Then the Lord opened the eyes of Balaam, and he saw the Angel of the Lord standing in the way, and his sword drawn in his hand: and he bowed down his head, and fell flat on his face.*

THE ministry of angels is frequently asserted both in the Old and New Testament: but, because it is not *seen*, it is scarcely believed amongst us. Nevertheless, there is not any doctrine more fully established than this; nor scarcely any more clearly exemplified. We need only look to the passage before us; and there we see an angel deputed to intercept Balaam in his way to Midian, and to stop him in his career of wickedness. Whether the angel were the Son of God himself, "the Angel of the Covenant," with

with whom Jacob afterwards wrestled[a], we will not absolutely determine: but the context seems to countenance the idea that it was[b]. At all events he had the appearance of an angel, and acted in the capacity of a messenger from heaven. For a considerable time Balaam did not see him; though the beast on which he rode, both saw, and endeavoured to avoid him. The whole story is so singular, that some have represented it as a vision. But, whilst that mode of accounting for the circumstances renders them not at all less miraculous than the more obvious interpretation, (for a divine agency would be as necessary in that case, as in the other,) it directly opposes the assertions of the historian, and the testimony of an inspired Apostle[c]. We can have no doubt but that the facts happened as they are related: and, that we may present them before you in a more easy manner, we will call your attention to some observations founded upon them.

I. God often mercifully interposes to obstruct sinners in their ways—

[Balaam, though he professed to be acting by the divine appointment, was in reality going in opposition to the will of God. The permission which had been granted him *conditionally*, he had construed as *unconditional;* and when God had declared that Israel should be *blessed*, Balaam was going with a desire and purpose to *curse* them. God, to awaken him to a sense of his wickedness, sent an angel to stop him in his way, and to make known to him the evil of his conduct.

It is thus that God often interposes to arrest the progress of sinners, and prevent the commission of iniquity. We say not, that he often proceeds *precisely in this way:* he has a great variety of ways in which he carries this gracious purpose into execution. Elihu, in his address to Job, directly affirms, that God *does* interpose, and in a variety of ways too, for this gracious end[d]: and the Scriptures universally attest the truth of his remark. Sometimes God endeavours to divert men from their purpose by a dream, (as Pilate, by a dream of his wife[e];) sometimes by a vision, (as Saul, in his way to Damascus[f];) sometimes by a judgment, (as Jeroboam, when he stretched out his hand against

[a] Hos. xii. 3—5.

[b] See ver. 32, 35. "perverse before *me*"—"the word that *I* shall speak."

[c] 2 Pet. ii. 16.

[d] Job xxxiii. 14—17.

[e] Matt. xxvii. 19.

[f] Acts ix. 3, 4.

against the man of God[g];) sometimes by a human monitor, (as David, by Abigail[h];) and sometimes by an unforeseen occurrence, (as Saul, when having encompassed David with his army, was called away from him by a sudden invasion of the Philistines[i].) We cannot enumerate, nor indeed conceive, the infinite variety of methods by which God withstands sinners; but all of us, on reflection, must acknowledge both the reality and frequency of his interpositions.

How often has it happened that the thief, the robber, the housebreaker, and the murderer, have been deterred from their purpose by the approach of some unexpected person, or by some suggestion of their own minds! How often have persons under a strong temptation to gratify their lusts, been kept from the actual commission of fornication or adultery by some little occurrence, some noise, some apprehension, some qualm of conscience, which God, in mercy to their souls, has sent to interrupt them! How many unhappy females have been kept from destroying their infant children, either before or after their birth, by some considerations widely different from the fear of sin! It is a well-known fact, that many people, but for such restraints as these, would have even destroyed their own lives: and perhaps, of the many who actually do commit suicide, there is scarcely one, who has not been repeatedly diverted from his purpose, before he could find it in his heart to carry it into execution. So common are the interpositions of God for the prevention of sin, and the rescue of those who would commit it! But,]

## II. His most signal interpositions often excite only the wrath of those for whose benefit they are sent—

[Thrice was Balaam interrupted in his course. The first time, his ass turned aside into a field, to avoid the Angel; the next time, he ran up against a wall; and the third time, having no other method of avoiding him left, he fell down: and at each time Balaam's anger was kindled; and at last it rose to such a height, that even the strange phenomenon of the ass speaking, as with a human voice, and expostulating with him, was not sufficient to arrest his attention: his only reply was, that he wished for a sword that he might kill her. Had he known at the time what danger he was exposed to, and what obligations he owed to his beast for that very conduct which so incensed him, he would have seen, that he had reason for unbounded thankfulness, where he thought that he had the greatest reason to complain.

And is it not thus oftentimes with *us?* If nothing had been revealed to us respecting the *deliverance* of Balaam, we should

[g] 1 Kin. xiii. 4. [h] 1 Sam. xxv. 32, 33. [i] 1 Sam. xxiii. 28.

have thought him fully justified in his *anger*: and, because we do not see the particular mercies which God vouchsafes to us, we think ourselves justified in raging against the means and instruments that he employs. There are a thousand things which we call *accidents*, on which the greatest events depend. Evils might have come to us, or blessings might have been lost, if some circumstance, which at the time we deemed most unfortunate, had not taken place: nor can any but God himself conceive the extent to which we are indebted to him for things, which at the time excited our grief and indignation.

On this subject, I must leave every one to consult his own experience. But there is one view of it which will come home to the hearts of all. How often, when God has sent a guardian angel, a friend or Minister, to instruct and warn us, have his reproofs kindled resentment, rather than gratitude, in our minds! and how many of us now see reason to be thankful for warnings which once excited our displeasure, whilst others have been eternally ruined by continuing to disregard them! Think only of the ministry of Christ and his Apostles, and of the different states of those who rejected or received their testimony, and this part of our subject will need no further comment. Moreover,]

III. Those interpositions which are acknowledged to have been sent in mercy, produce, for the most part, a very transient effect—

[Balaam, when his eyes were opened, and he was informed that he had narrowly escaped death, acknowledged his sin, and professed a readiness to return. But it is observable, that his very confession touches only on the *supposed* guilt of attempting to proceed in opposition to the Angel, and not on the *real* guilt of going with a disposition and purpose directly opposed to the known will of God. So far from being humbled for this offence, he was glad at any rate to gain a renewed permissiom to prosecute his vile designs. Nor did he afterwards reflect, or repent him of his evil ways; but persisted in them, till vengeance overtook him, and he perished amongst the enemies of God.

Thus have we at times been made sensible of our danger. Some great calamity has overtaken us, or disease has brought us to the gates of death. *Then* we have acknowledged our sins, and professed a willingness to forsake them. But no sooner have the impediments been removed, than "our goodness has proved as the morning dew; and as the early cloud it has passed away." Thus it was with Pharaoh, when God, by many successive judgments, strove to overcome his obstinacy: and thus it was with Saul, when David repeatedly spared his life. The judgments and mercies of God affected both of them for a moment, so that they confessed their sins: but the effect was transient, and they perished under an accumulated weight of guilt. O that it may

not

not be so with us! O that we may not any longer resemble the rebellious Israelites[k]; lest, like them, we exhaust the patience of our God, and provoke him to "swear in his wrath that we shall never enter into his rest!"]

ADDRESS,

1. Those who are bent on their evil ways—

[Covetousness is a common, and destructive sin: and many are guilty of it, whilst they seem unconscious of any great evil. They are decidedly guilty of it, who prefer the prosecution of their interests to the will of God and the welfare of his people. Let such offenders know then, that God and his Angel stand before them with a fiery sword; and that, for aught they know, the very next step they take may transmit them to the presence of an angry God. Methinks, the brute creation that obey *their* will, would, if their mouths were opened, rebuke their disobedience, more pointedly than ever Balaam's ass rebuked him[l]. See, Brethren, how Solomon describes your state[m]! see how he warns you of your end[n]! O beg of God, that he would never give you his permission to proceed, but contend with you effectually, till he has gained his point! If once "he give you up," and say, "Let him alone[o]," it were better for you that you had never been born.]

2. Those who desire to return from them—

[Whatever have been the means of stopping your career, be thankful for it: falls or bruises, such as Balaam had, are mercies when sent for such an end. Bear in mind what your conduct has been[p], and be humbled on account of it in dust and ashes. Bear in mind too that you will assuredly "return, like the dog to his vomit," if Almighty God do not keep you by his grace. But he has promised to his people to "hedge up their way with thorns, and to build a wall against them, that they may not find their former ways[q]:" intreat him earnestly to do this for you; and to "keep you by his own power through faith unto salvation."]

[k] Ps. lxxviii. 34—37.
[l] Isai. i. 2, 3. Jer. viii. 5—7.
[m] Eccl. ix. 3.
[n] Prov. xxix. 1.
[o] Ps. lxxxi. 11, 12. Hos. iv. 17.
[p] Isai. lvii. 17.
[q] Hos. ii. 6, 7.

## CXXII.

### BALAAM'S FIRST ATTEMPT TO CURSE ISRAEL.

Numb. xxiii. 7—10. *And he took up his parable, and said, Balak, the king of Moab, hath brought me from Aram, out of the mountains of the East, saying, Come, curse me Jacob; and come, defy Israel. How shall I curse whom God*

*God hath not cursed? or how shall I defy whom the Lord hath not defied? For from the top of the rocks I see him, and from the hills I behold him: lo, the people shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations. Who can count the dust of Jacob, and the number of the fourth part of Israel? Let me die the death of the righteous; and let my last end be like his!*

IT is scarcely to be conceived to what a degree superstition will blind the eyes of men. There is nothing so absurd or incredible, which a person under the influence of it is not ready to believe. Who would imagine that persons could be brought to believe the infallibility of the Pope, and the power of the Popish priests to forgive sin? Who would suppose that any person should be brought to believe, that a priest is able to convert bread and wine into the body and soul, yea, and into the Godhead also of Christ; and that every individual who partakes of that bread and wine, eats and drinks the whole body, the whole soul, and the whole Godhead of Christ? Yet these things are credited by millions of persons, as firmly as they believe that there is a God.

Were it not that we had such evidence of the power of superstition in later ages, we should scarcely conceive, that any Being endowed with reason should act like Balak, when he sent for Balaam to curse Israel. How could he entertain such a foolish thought, as that Balaam should be able to inflict a a curse upon the whole Israelitish nation, so as to insure the conquest of them to the king of Moab? Yet this superstition obtained, not only there, and at that time, but 1500 years afterwards at Rome also, where there was an officer expressly appointed to imprecate curses on their enemies.

How little it was in the power of Balaam to effect, we see in every renewed attempt that he made. So far from being able to *inflict* a curse on Israel, he was not able even to *denounce* one: for God overruled and constrained him to *bless* the people whom he desired to *curse*.

Having

Having offered seven bullocks and seven rams on as many altars, he came to Balak, who was anxiously expecting the accomplishment of his wishes. But, behold, the man on whose power he relied to curse Israel, was constrained explicitly to declare,

I. Their security—

Balaam acknowledges that it was *not in his power* to curse them: and declares that, instead of being vanquished by Balak, they should prevail against every enemy, and *be a peculiar people* to the end of time.

This has ever since been verified in relation to those who are *Israelites after the flesh*—

[That nation did prevail over their enemies; did get possession of Canaan; did maintain it against all their enemies, till, for their iniquities, God sent them into captivity in Babylon. Yet even there did they retain their peculiarities: yea, even at this day, though dispersed through every country under heaven, they are as much a peculiar people as ever. Other nations, when vanquished and dispersed, have become incorporated with their victors, and been assimilated to the people amongst whom they have dwelt: but the Jews in every country are still a distinct people: and are living witnesses of the truth of this prophecy.]

It is no less verified in relation to *the spiritual Israel*—

[Every blessing promised to Abraham and his *natural* seed was, *in a spiritual sense*, made also to his spiritual seed. The Gospel itself, with all the blessings of Salvation, was contained in that promise, "In thy seed shall all nations be blessed[a]." It is evident, moreover, that Balaam himself was instructed of God to prophesy of persons under the Gospel dispensation, even of those who should be the subjects of the Lord Jesus Christ[b]. Now *they* are indeed a peculiar people[c]:" they "dwell alone:" "though *in* the world, they are not *of* the world, even as Christ himself was not of the world[d]:" they "are not conformed to it;" "they come out from it and are separate;" they can "have no more communion with it, than light can have with darkness, or Christ with Belial." They dwell in the midst of enemies, amongst whom they are "men wondered at." Wherever they are, they are, and ever have been, in a greater or less degree, objects of hatred and persecution. Every possible method has been used to extirpate them; but no enemy has

[a] Gal. iii. 8. [b] Numb. xxiv. 17—19.
[c] Exod. xix. 5, 6. 1 Pet. ii. 9. [d] John xvii. 14, 16.

has ever been able to prevail against them. They are still, and ever shall be, monuments of God's power, and objects of his love.]

II. Their increase—

The Israelites, as a nation, became very numerous—

[At the time that Balaam saw them, they probably amounted to two millions: but after their settlement in Canaan they multiplied exceedingly, so as to fulfil the promise made to Abraham[e], and to justify the declaration in the text.]

But the true Israel shall *indeed* be "as the dust of the earth"—

[In the first ages of Christianity they were spread over the whole Roman Empire: and though we acknowledge that hitherto they have not been numerous, *when compared with their enemies*, yet we are assured, that they shall in due time cover the earth as the waters cover the sea, and for the space of a thousand years fill the whole earth. And, if we consider how they will multiply when wars shall cease, when the diseases arising from men's folly and wickedness shall be removed, and "the man dying at an hundred years old shall be considered but a child," brought to an untimely end[f]; we may well imagine, that their numbers shall far exceed that of all who have perished in their sins. We are sure at all events, that, in the last day, they shall be "a multitude, which no man can number, out of every nation, and kindred, and people, and tongue;" and that they shall join together in everlasting hallelujahs, "saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb[g]!" O blessed period! May "God hasten it, in His time!"]

III. Their happiness—

Balaam proclaims them happy also in their eternal state—

[Here he *must* refer to those who were the *true* Israelites; since an ungodly Jew can no more be saved, than an ungodly heathen. And it is worthy of notice, how strongly he asserts the happiness of the godly in a future world. He looked forward to their future state: he saw them distinguished from the ungodly; he saw, that, however they might be involved in the calamities of the wicked *here*, they would be translated by death to a state of endless felicity: hence he envied them, and desired to have "his last end like theirs."]

And truly in this view they are objects of envy to the whole world—

[The wish that Balaam expressed is the wish of every man, even

[e] Gen. xxviii. 14. [f] Isai. lxv. 20. [g] Rev. vii. 9.

even of the most abandoned. There is no one living under the light of the Gospel, but feels an inward persuasion that God will put a difference between the righteous and the wicked. However much he may hate the *persons* of the godly, he envies their *state;* and has at some time the thought come into his mind, 'If I were now to die, I should be glad to be found in your state.' And well may this be the case, seeing that God has prepared for them "such good things as pass man's understanding"———— Were it not for their future prospects, they would be rather in a piteable condition, especially in seasons of bitter persecution[h]: but, with such hopes before them, they can be in no condition whatever, wherein they are not greatly to be envied———]

To IMPROVE this subject, we shall add a word,

1. Of warning—

[Balaam by all his efforts could not prevail on God to reverse his word respecting Israel: on the contrary, the word which he delivered by God's command has been fulfilled to them in all ages. And shall not what God hath spoken both here and elsewhere, respecting the *end* of the righteous and the wicked, be fulfilled? Shall any man *die the death* of the righteous, if he will not *live his life;* or shall he attain his *end* without walking in his *way?* If God has declared that he *will* "put a difference between those who serve him, and those who serve him not," who shall prevail upon him to change his mind? or "who shall harden himself against HIM, and prosper?" O, think of this, Beloved, and buoy not up yourselves with unfounded expectations: for "God is not a man that he should lie, or the son of man that he should repent."]

2. Of consolation—

[Little did Israel know what plots were formed against them: but God knew, and counteracted them all. Thus it is with God's Israel now. Both men and devils are confederate against them: Satan especially, "like a roaring lion, goeth about seeking, if possible, to devour them:" but God overrules all their devices for good, and gives us a blessing where they would have sent a curse. He has promised, that "no weapon that is formed against us shall prosper:" and he will fulfil it even to the end: he will "keep us by his own power through faith unto everlasting salvation." Let us then not say, A confederacy, a confederacy; but let us "sanctify the Lord God in our hearts, and make *him* our fear, and *him* our dread." He will be "a wall of fire round about us, and the glory in the midst of us:" he will keep us even as the apple of his eye: nor "shall any one who trusts in him, ever be ashamed or confounded world without end." As Balaam could not prevail against

[h] 1 Cor. xv. 19. ἐλεεινότεροι.

against Israel of old, so "not all the gates of hell shall prevail against us." Only put your trust in God, and you may, in the language of the Apostle, defy the whole universe to "separate you from the love of God[i]."]

[i] Rom. viii. 35—39.

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## CXXIII.

### BALAAM'S SECOND ATTEMPT TO CURSE ISRAEL.

Numb. xxiii. 18—23. *And he took up his parable, and said, Rise up, Balak, and hear; hearken unto me, thou son of Zippor: God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good? Behold, I have received commandment to bless; and he hath blessed; and I cannot reverse it. He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath he seen perverseness in Israel: the Lord his God is with him, and the shout of a king is among them. God brought them out of Egypt: he hath as it were the strength of an unicorn. Surely there is no enchantment against Jacob, neither is there any divination against Israel: according to this time it shall be said of Jacob and of Israel, What hath God wrought!*

THE distinct answers which God gave to Balaam are surely deserving of distinct consideration. The general scope of them indeed is the same; namely, that Israel should be blessed: but the terms in which that declaration was made, are diversified, and contain in them a great variety of important matter. We are astonished indeed that God would condescend to notice Balaam a second time, more especially as he had the impiety to approach him with divinations and enchantments[a]. But, for the sake of his Church and people, the Lord himself met Balaam again, and constrained him, in his reply to Balak, to declare,

I. The immutability of God—

Balaam had endeavoured to turn God from his purpose; and perhaps, from having, as he conceived, prevailed upon him to reverse his word before, he hoped to succeed in like manner again. But

[a] ch. xxiv. 1.

But he was compelled to confess to Balak *the inefficacy of his attempts to change the mind of God*—

[Balak had supposed Balaam to be capable of effecting great things; and had imputed his former answer to a want of inclination, rather than of power, to comply with his wishes. But Balaam here distinctly confesses, that it was not in his power to "reverse," or alter, what God had spoken: and that, consequently, it was in vain to make any renewed attempts.

Man, from a variety of causes, might be led to change his mind: he might gain a further insight into a matter than he had possessed before; or he might be biassed by some intervening interests; or he might find himself incapable of executing his projects for want of power: but no such occasions of change can exist in God: "He is not a man that he should lie;" there is in him "no variableness, neither shadow of turning:" "He *cannot* lie:" "it is *impossible* that he should[b]:" he is as unchangeable in his *purposes*, as he is in his *perfections*: "He is of one mind; and who can turn him?" So self-evident was this truth, that Balaam appealed even to the conscience of Balak himself respecting it: "Hath he said, and shall he not do it?"

This view of the Deity was a sufficient answer to Balak: it was a pledge to him, that the promises originally made to Abraham should be fulfilled to his descendants. And it is an answer too to all the unbelieving fears which occasionally arise in our minds. "God's gifts and callings are without repentance[c]." "He will not forsake his people, because it hath pleased him to make them his people[d]:" and it is owing solely to the unchangeableness of his mercies, that any one of his people escapes destruction: "He changeth not; and therefore the sons of Jacob are not consumed[e]."]

The immutability of God being established, Balaam proceeded to recite,

II. The kindness he (God) had already shewn to his people—

This was such as gave Balak but little hope of ever succeeding against them—

[God had forgiven their sins, so that nothing which they had done amiss should ever provoke him to destroy them. Doubtless there was in them much "iniquity," and much "perverseness:" but they had not renounced their allegiance to him, or their affiance in him; and therefore he would not give them up to their enemies. He had "cast all their sins behind his back into the depths of the sea," and he viewed them only with an eye of love and mercy. He considered them still as *his* peculiar *people*:

[b] Tit. i. 2. Heb. vi. 18.
[c] Rom. xi. 29.
[d] 1 Sam. xii. 22.
[e] Mal. iii. 6.

*people:* and he dwelt in the midst of them as *their* God. Moreover, such manifestations did he afford them of his love and favour, that they could not but rejoice in their security, and triumph in him, with shouts and acclamations, as their Almighty Protector.]

It shews us also what God does for his people at this time—

[The best of his people are but imperfect creatures: "in many things we all offend." But, if we be truly his, "he does not behold iniquity or perverseness in us." We are not by this to understand, that sin, if committed by the Lord's people, is not sinful; or that it is not most hateful in his eyes: but we are to understand that he is "not extreme to mark what we do amiss;" that, on the contrary, he views us as "perfect in Christ Jesus," by whom we are "presented faultless before him," and through whose blood and righteousness we are made "without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, yea holy, and without blemish[f]."

Regarding us thus as objects of his favour, he delights to dwell amongst us, to abide with us, to manifest himself to us, and to "fill us with joy and peace in believing;" so that he enables us to say with the Apostle, "Thanks be to God, who always causeth us to triumph in Christ Jesus!" Truly, "the children of Zion are made joyful in their king," yea they "ever shout for joy, because he defendeth them:" "they sing unto him for the excellent things which he hath done; they cry out and shout, because great is the Holy One of Israel in the midst of them[g]."]

From the mention of what God hath done for his people, Balaam went on to declare,

III. The kindness he has yet in reserve for them—

The time was soon to come when all the surrounding nations should be astonished at it—

[God had already "brought them out of Egypt, and given them, as it were, the strength of an unicorn." He had suffered no machinations of men or devils to prevail against them. He had fulfilled all his promises to them hitherto; and the time was now nearly arrived, when he would accomplish them in their full extent. However formidable the opposition to them might be, "they should rise up like a lion to his prey, which lies not down till he has drunk the blood of the slain." In a word, such should be his marvellous interpositions in their favour, that all who beheld them should exclaim, "What hath God wrought!"]

But it was a mere shadow of the kindness he has laid up for us—

[It

[f] Eph. v. 27. Jude 24. [g] Ps. cxxvi. 1, 2. & Isai. xii. 5, 6.

[It is not from an Egyptian tyrant that we are delivered, but from sin and Satan, death and hell. Nor are we endued with strength against an earthly enemy, but against all the powers of darkness; insomuch that "Satan himself shall be bruised under our feet shortly." Not only shall "the gates of hell never prevail against his Church" at large, but not against even the weakest of his people: both Christ and his Father are pledged, that "however weak the believer may be, none shall ever be able to pluck him out of their hands[h]." The least of the flock have no more cause to fear than the greatest; for "it is the Father's good pleasure to give, to the one as well as to the other, the possession of his kingdom[i]." The weakest shall be "strong in the Lord," yea, strong as a lion: he shall be "able to do all things" that are conducive to his welfare; and shall be "more than conqueror through Him that loved him." O what "a wonder is he unto many," even at this time! and what a wonder will he be, both to himself and others, in the eternal world! When the whole Israel of God shall be in possession of the heavenly land, how will each say, on a review of his own mercies in particular, as well as those vouchsafed to the whole collective body, "What hath God wrought!" Truly, they will all be lost in wonder, love, and praise.]

Let none dismiss this subject from their minds without REFLECTING,

1. How great are their obligations to God!

[Here, as in a glass, we may see them very distinctly: and we read this history to little purpose, if we see not in it transactions of the present day. To recapitulate the mercies of God towards us, or to point out their correspondence with those that were vouchsafed to Israel, is needless. The slight mention we have already made of them is sufficient. But it is of importance to ask, What effect have they produced upon our minds? Have we not again and again been constrained to say, "What hath God wrought!" "What manner of love is this wherewith the Father hath loved us!" Be assured, that the man who is not frequently (I might almost say, habitually,) impressed with this thought, knows nothing of God, nor has he any part or lot in the Gospel salvation — — —]

2. How strenuous should be their exertions to walk worthy of them!

[It is thought by some, that views of God's sovereign grace and unchanging love will lead men to carelessness and presumption. It behoves us all to shew, that there is no foundation for this calumny; and that the stupendous love of Christ will rather constrain us to obedience. Let us remember, that, if the promises

[h] John x. 28, 29. [i] Luke xii. 32.

promises of God are sure, so also are the threatenings: and that we can no more reverse these, than Satan can reverse the others, if we be found in a state against which God has threatened his displeasure.

How painful is the thought, that notwithstanding all the warnings which God has given them, many will yet perish in their sins! Methinks, if God's mercy will excite wonder among those that are saved, so will sin excite wonder among them that perish. With what force will that reflection strike us in the day of judgment, "What hath SIN wrought!" O think upon it now: and let us not only flee from it, but endeavour so to "walk, that God in all things may be glorified through Christ Jesus!"]

## CXXIV.

### BALAAM'S THIRD ATTEMPT TO CURSE ISRAEL.

Numb. xxiv. 5, 9. *How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, and thy tabernacles, O Israel!* ——— *Blessed is he that blesseth thee; and cursed is he that curseth thee.*

IF there were no other instance than that before us, we could never doubt the influence of God over all his creatures. Balaam had shewn strongly enough his desire to curse Israel; but had been twice constrained to speak the words which God had put into his mouth. On this third occasion, he saw that it was in vain to use enchantments; and therefore he laid them all aside; and gave himself up, without any further resistance, to declare whatever God should say unto him.

His preface is usually represented as a pompous recital of his own peculiar privileges and attainments: but it is rather a relation of the circumstances that occurred whilst he was on his way to Balak. He speaks of himself as "the man whose eyes *were shut*," (so it *should be* read; and so it *is read* in the margin of our Bibles:) and who "had a vision of the Almighty, *falling*, but having his eyes open:" (the words, "*into a trance*," are printed in Italics, to shew that they are inserted by the translators, and *are not in the original:*) his ass fell, and he fell also; and then his eyes were opened, to see the Angel; whom, though his ass had seen, *he* had not till then been

been enabled to behold. On a view of the orderly manner in which the Israelites were encamped, he expressed his admiration of them; and then, in the concluding words of our text declared the irreversible decree of God respecting them: "Blessed &c. &c."

We shall consider these words,

I. In reference to the Jewish nation—

To them, in their primary sense, the words must certainly refer. But, when we read such a solemn declaration respecting them, we are naturally led to ask,

1. How can we account for it?

[Was there any peculiar *merit* in them, that had induced Jehovah so wonderfully to signalize them with his favour? No: they were a stiff-necked people from first to last. But God had "chosen them for himself to be a peculiar people:" and had pledged himself to fulfil to them all the promises, which he had made to Abraham respecting them. Whoever therefore should set himself against that people, would be endeavouring to thwart the divine counsels; whilst every one who should promote the prosperity of Zion, would, in fact, advance the designs of God. No wonder therefore God pronounced a blessing or a curse on all, according as they co-operated with him, or opposed his will.]

2. How was it fulfilled?

[In addition to all that has been stated on the two former occasions; we are here led to contemplate the prosperity of Israel under the images of a verdant valley, a well-watered garden, and fragrant or stately trees: they are further spoken of as marvellously enriched, prolific, powerful. But we may particularly notice the discrimination made between the Gibeonites and all the other nations of Canaan. *These*, because they made a league with Joshua, were spared, protected, and preserved; whilst all the others, without exception, were destroyed[a]. And, many hundred years afterwards, when Saul had broken the covenant with them, and had sought to destroy them, God avenged their cause by a famine during three successive years, and caused the injustice of Saul to be punished in the destruction of almost all his family[b]. When at last the Israelites had provoked God utterly to abandon them, they became weak as others, and were left, as at this day, to experience all the evils, which, as God's instruments, they themselves had inflicted upon other nations.]

The declaration in our text must further be considered,

II. In

[a] Josh. ix. 25—27. & x. 1—11.

[b] 2 Sam. xxi. 1—9.

II. In reference to the spiritual Israel—

If only we reflect, that this declaration was a repetition of the promise made to Abraham and to Jacob, its application to the *spiritual* seed of Abraham will be obvious and undeniable[c]. Let us consider then,

1. What is implied in this declaration?

[It does not relate to *temporal* benefits or evils, but to those which are *spiritual* and *eternal*——And it shall assuredly be fulfilled to men in its utmost extent, according as they shall be found to have loved and aided the true Israelites, or to have hated and opposed them[d]——Divine Providence even in this world may be expected to put a difference between the friends and enemies of Zion[e]: but, if none be visible in this world, it shall be made visible enough in the world to come[f].]

2. On what ground we may expect its accomplishment?

[The circumstance of its being uttered by the voice of inspiration, is a pledge of its accomplishment. It may appear strange indeed that God should interest himself to such an extent in behalf of his believing people: but there are two grounds on which we may be well assured that he will do so: the one is, that *he considers our conduct towards his Church, as a criterion of our true character*[g]; and the other is, that *he identifies himself with his Church*, accounting every thing which is done to *them*, as done to *himself*[h]. Realize these thoughts, and all doubt respecting the accomplishment of the declaration will vanish for ever.]

LEARN,

1. The importance of ascertaining our true character—

[If we truly "love him that begat, we shall also love those who are begotten of him[i]." Let us bring ourselves to this test, and carefully judge ourselves as in the presence of God.]

2. The blessedness of being Israelites indeed—

[If God be so interested about you as to deal with men according to their conduct towards you, what blessings may not you yourselves expect at his hands?——]

[c] Gen. xii. 3. & xxvii. 29.
[d] Isai. liv. 15—17. & lx. 14. & lxv. 13, 14.
[e] Ps. cxxii. 6. & cxxix. 5—8. [f] 2 Thess. i. 6, 7.
[g] Luke ii. 34, 35. 1 Pet. ii. 6—8.
[h] Whether *good*, Matt. xxv. 40. or *evil*, Zech. ii. 8. Acts ix. 4, 5.
[i] 1 John v. 1.

## CXXV.

### PHINEHAS REWARDED FOR HIS ZEAL.

Numb. xxv. 10—13. *And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, hath turned my wrath away from the children of Israel, (while he was zealous for my sake among them,) that I consumed not the children of Israel in my jealousy. Wherefore say, Behold, I give unto him my covenant of peace: and he shall have it, and his seed after him, even the covenant of an everlasting priesthood; because he was zealous for his God, and made an atonement for the children of Israel.*

SATAN is incessant in his endeavours to destroy the people of God: and, if one device fail, he has recourse to another: nor is he ever at a loss for a succession of expedients, whereby to accomplish his malignant ends. He had laboured hard, in concert with Balaam his willing agent, to bring a curse upon Israel: but he had been foiled in every attempt. What, however, he could not effect by the sword of Moab, he more successfully essayed to do through the influence of their own corruptions, and the fascinations of abandoned women: and, if the zeal of Phinehas had not intervened to arrest the arm of divine vengeance, we know not to what an extent the calamities of Israel might have reached.

In considering what is here recorded concerning Phinehas, we shall notice,

I. The act for which he was rewarded—

A most grievous iniquity was committed in the camp—

[Balaam had advised Balak to ensnare the Iraelites by means of the Midianitish women[a]. An intercourse between them had been opened: the Israelites fell into the snare; and were drawn into unlawful connexions with them, and then into idolatry itself. Thus God was incensed against his people; and after having protected them from the imprecations of Balaam, became himself the executioner of heavy judgments upon them. In addition to the plague which he himself inflicted upon the people, he ordered Moses to send forth and slay the chief offenders, and to hang them up in the sight of all the congregation.

Whilst these judgments were executing, and the unoffending part of the congregation were "weeping before the door of the taber-

[a] Numb. xxxi. 16. Rev. ii. 14.

tabernacle," behold, a man of distinction in one of the tribes brought a Midianitish woman to his tent, in the very sight of Moses and of all the congregation. The guilt of such an illicit commerce would under any circumstances have been exceeding great; but at such a *time*, and in such a *manner*, was criminal in the highest degree: it was shameless in the extreme: it was an open defiance both of God and man.]

To punish it as it deserved, Phinehas stood forth with holy zeal—

[He seized a javelin, and followed the abandoned criminals to the tent, and pierced them through in the midst of their guilty pleasures. This might appear to have been an usurpation of legal authority: but it was not so: for the chief Magistrate himself had given the command to all the judges of Israel: moreover, being the son of the High Priest, it is reasonable to suppose that Phinehas was himself a Magistrate: at all events, he acted by a divine impulse, and was "God's Minister, a revenger to execute wrath upon these evil-doers." Such an *act* in US would be unjustifiable; because we have received no such commission either from God or man: but the *spirit from which it proceeded*, would be commendable in whomsoever it were found: we *ought* to be filled with a zeal for God's honour: we *ought* to feel indignation against sin: we *ought* to be penetrated with compassion towards those who are in danger of perishing through the impiety of others: and we *ought* to be ready to assist the Civil Magistrate in the suppression of iniquity.]

God's approbation of his conduct was strongly marked in,

II. The reward conferred upon him—

Instantly was God pacified towards his offending people—

[Already had 23,000 persons fallen by the plague, and another thousand by the sword of justice[b]: but, on the execution of this signal vengeance, God stopped the plague, and commanded the sword of justice to be sheathed. He accepted this as "an atonement for the children of Israel." Not that there was any thing in the blood of the victims, that could expiate sin; but their death was considered as a sacrifice to divine justice; and God took occasion from it to return in mercy to his repenting people. What a glorious reward was this! Not a family throughout all the tribes of Israel could help feeling its obligations to him, and acknowledging him as its benefactor.]

Immediately too did "God give him his covenant of an everlasting priesthood"—

[True

[b] Compare ver. 9. with 1 Cor. x. 8.

[True it was, that Phinehas was next in succession to the priesthood; but it was not insured to *him*, and *his* seed, till God now gave it to him by an express promise. The covenant of priesthood is called "a covenant of peace," both because it was a testimony of divine acceptance to Phinehas himself[c], and (as long as the priesthood should last) the means of maintaining peace between God and his people: it also shadowed forth that better priesthood, which should be the means of reconciling the whole world to God, and God unto the world.

This priesthood, we know, was typical of Christ; but, whether the giving of it in consequence of "the atonement made" by Phinehas was typical of him, we cannot say: but this is clear, that the giving of the priesthood to Phinehas, as a reward for the zeal he had exercised, was intended to shew, to the remotest ages, that "it is good to be zealously affected always in a good thing[d];" and that they who serve God with their *whole hearts*, shall have the most intimate access to him in this world, and participate his glory in the world to come: "they shall be kings and priests unto their God for ever and ever."]

We cannot REFLECT on this history without seeing in a striking point of view,

1. The danger of indulging sin in ourselves—

[Whilst the Israelites were obedient to the divine commands, they were safe: God turned all the execrations of their enemies into blessings[e]. But when they allowed themselves to be tempted by the Midianitish women, they fell from one sin to another, and provoked God himself to become their enemy. Happy will it be for us, if we learn from their experience to resist iniquity in its first approaches; lest we fall and perish after their example. And let not this caution be deemed unworthy the attention of any. If David, and Solomon, were betrayed into the most grievous iniquities by means of their ungoverned appetites, who is he that shall think himself secure? Solomon's description of an abandoned woman is but too just; "Her heart is as snares and nets, and her hands as bands[f]:" he tells us too, that "many strong men have been slain by her; and that her house is the way to hell[g]." Many who once appeared to be in the way to heaven, have found this to their cost: and many of us who are yet out of hell, owe it more to the long-suffering of God than to any virtue of our own. Let such persons then be thankful to God for his mercy; and, "if any man think that he standeth, let him take heed lest he fall."]

2. The duty of restraining sin in others—

[Wherefore were these rewards conferred on Phinehas, but to

[c] Ps. cvi. 28—31. [d] Gal. iv. 18. [e] Deut. xxiii. 5.
[f] Eccl. vii. 26. [g] Prov. vii. 24—27.

to shew the world the acceptableness of such services as his. And to what purpose has he committed the power of the sword to Magistrates, if they are not to be a terror to the workers of iniquity? This power is a talent for which Magistrates are responsible to God: and, if they shrink not from using it, merely because the exercise of it would subject them to the reproaches of the ungodly, let them bear in mind, that they shall receive commendations from their God; and that, by every friend of piety and of order, they will be reckoned, like Phinehas, the truest patriots of their day. Ministers too, in their respective spheres, should use influence for the suppression of iniquity; boldly rebuking it in public, and using every lawful method of discountenancing it in private. Persons too in every sphere of life should co-operate for the same benevolent purpose; assured that by obstructing the progress of sin, they approve themselves the best friends both of God and man.]

3. The greatness of our obligations to the Lord Jesus Christ—

[If Phinehas was so great a Benefactor to his country, and deserved the thanks of all, for sacrificing the lives of two licentious profligates, what thanks are due to the Lord Jesus Christ, who offered *his own* life a sacrifice for us! Here was love unsearchable, and zeal unparalleled. To him must every human Being confess his obligations: to him must every one that shall finally be saved, render everlasting praise and honour. O let every one throughout the camp of Israel behold his Benefactor: let every one contemplate Jesus as appeasing the wrath of God, and effecting our reconciliation with him: and, inasmuch as "for his obedience unto death God hath highly exalted him, and given him a name above every name," let every heart acknowledge him; let every knee bow to him; and every tongue be occupied in ascribing glory to his name.]

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## CXXVI.

### PERISHING OF THE ISRAELITES IN THE WILDERNESS.

Numb. xxvi. 63—65. *These are they that were numbered by Moses and Eleazar the priest, who numbered the children of Israel in the plains of Moab, by Jordan near Jericho. But among these there was not a man of them whom Moses and Aaron the priest numbered, when they numbered the children of Israel in the wilderness of Sinaï: for the Lord had said of them, They shall surely die in the wilderness. And there was not left a man of them, save Caleb the son of Jephunneh, and Joshua the son of Nun.*

THE

THE Israelites in some repects had an advantage over us, inasmuch as they had the most stupendous miracles wrought before their eyes: but we have an incomparably greater advantage over them, in seeing the accomplishment of many prophecies relating to them, and the design of God in his diversified dispensations towards them. The miracles would strike the senses more forcibly for a little time; but the accomplishment of prophecy commends itself to our judgment, and operates with more permanent effect. The event before us, for instance, carries an irresistible conviction with it to every reflecting mind. The Israelites had been numbered in the wilderness of Sinai[a]: but for their sin at Kadesh-barnea, where they refused to go up and possess the land, they were doomed to die in the wilderness[b]. Two exceptions alone were made, Caleb and Joshua, who had boldly testified against the wickedness of the people on that occasion, and encouraged them to maintain a confidence in their God. Now the time for entering into Canaan was nearly arrived; and Moses and Eleazar were commanded to number the people again, and to ascertain, for the instruction of the nation at large, the perfect accomplishment of this prophecy. Accordingly, it was ascertained by minute investigation, and it is here distinctly affirmed for the benefit of the whole world. The fact that is here asserted, is often mentioned in the New Testament for the benefit of the Church at this day: and it is in this particular view that we shall insist upon it. It was intended to shew us,

I. That sinners derive no security from their numbers—

[There is a conceit in the minds of men, that God can never condemn so many as they see to be walking in the ways of sin: and though they cannot but acknowledge, that the lives of a few religious persons are far more agreeable to the Scriptures than than those of the generality of mankind, yet they deem it presumptuous in these to imagine themselves in a safer state than others. As for the distinctions which are made in the word of God, the promises of life to the godly, and the threatening of death

[a] Numb. i. 1—3. [b] Numb. xiv. 28—30.

death to the ungodly, they are accounted of but little weight: men's own surmisings, however groundless, are made to outweigh the plainest declarations of holy writ. Here then the matter has been put to a trial. The whole nation of Israel had offended God, and were to be excluded from the promised land: but two individuals, who had withstood the torrent of iniquity, were to have the honour and happiness of entering into Canaan. Now on the borders of that land the people are numbered a second time; and after a complete survey of every tribe, it is declared, yea *twice* declared, that "*not a man*" against whom the judgment had been denounced, had survived. Thus it will assuredly be in the eternal world. Men are now told that the unrighteous shall not enter into heaven: but, because they constitute the great mass of mankind, they doubt whether the threatening will be executed: nevertheless, when a scrutiny shall be made of those who shall be at the right hand of God, there will not be found a man, no, "*not a man*," whom God in his word had consigned to another place. The "broad and frequented road will be found to have led to destruction;" nor will so much as one have attained to life, who did not "enter in at the strait gate, and walk in the narrow way[c]."]

II. That no outward privileges or professions will save them—

[*In this view in particular is the destruction of the Israelites proposed to our consideration in the New Testament*[d]. Their privileges were exceeding great, and they could boast of having experienced the most marvellous interpositions of the Deity in their behalf. But were they *therefore* saved? Yea, was not God so offended with them, that he even "sware in his wrath that they should not enter into his rest?" To what purpose then is it that we have been baptized into the name of Christ; that we have his word in our hands, his presence in our assemblies, his promises on our lips? To what purpose is it that we have "eaten spiritual meat, and drank spiritual drink," at his table, if we are yet children of disobedience? Were the Jews rejected for their unbelief? So shall *we* be, if we have not that "faith, which purifies the heart." If "Christ be not formed in our hearts," so as to make us "partakers of a divine nature," "the labour bestowed upon us will be in vain." We must "live by faith on the Son of God," and "walk as Christ himself walked," or else we never find admission into his rest. Nor is it by "running well for a season," but "by a patient continuance in well-doing," that we shall attain eternal life. We must both begin well, and "endure unto the end," if ever we would be counted worthy of that heavenly kingdom.]

III. That

[c] Matt. vii. 13, 14.

[d] Jude 5. & 1 Cor. x. 1—6. & Heb. iii. 17—19. & iv. 1.

III. That the divine judgments, however long delayed, will overtake them at last—

[Though at first, when sent back into the wilderness, the people confessed their sins with apparent contrition, they soon relapsed into their former habits; and probably after a season indulged a hope, that they should succeed as well as those to whom the promises had been made. This is the way of sinners: "because judgment is not executed speedily upon them," they think it never will. "The scoffers in the last days will say, Where is the promise of his coming?" But God assures us, that "the judgment of sinners now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not." God had respect to the posterity of Israel, when "he suffered their manners in the wilderness forty years:" he had a chosen seed who were yet in their loins, and who were in due time to enjoy that inheritance, which their fathers had despised. "He gave them also space for repentance," that they might not be excluded from heaven itself. Thus "is he long-suffering towards *us* also, not willing that any of us should perish, but that we should come to repentance and live." But we deceive ourselves, if we think that he will never call us into judgment: on the contrary, he will require at our hands every talent he has entrusted to us, and increase our punishment in proportion to the mercies we have abused. O that those who are more advanced in life would contemplate this! that they would "account the long-suffering of God to be salvation," and not make it the occasion of a more aggravated condemnation!],

IV. That no one of God's faithful servants shall ever perish—

[At this numbering of the people, Caleb and Joshua were found alive, though all the rest were dead: so exactly had death executed its commission! Of 600,000 offenders, not one had escaped its dart: but the two who had "followed the Lord fully," remained unhurt. This shews how certainly the promises of God shall be fulfilled to every believer. Be the numbers of the Lord's people ever so few, they shall not be overlooked: though the whole universe be sifted and blown away as chaff, "not the smallest grain of true wheat shall fall upon the earth[a]." They have many and powerful adversaries; but "none shall pluck them out of their Father's hand." "It is not His will that one of his little ones should perish." They may be so weak in faith as to indulge many fears of the issue of their warfare; but God himself pledges his word, that "they shall never perish, but shall have eternal life." Be not discouraged then, Believers, because ye are few, or weak, or despised, or beset with enemies all around; for the word of Christ to you is, "Fear not, little flock;

[a] Am ix. 9.

flock; it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." Only "commit your souls to God in well-doing, as into the hands of a faithful Creator," and he will "preserve you blameless unto his heavenly kingdom."]

## CXXVII.

### APPOINTMENT OF JOSHUA TO SUCCEED MOSES.

Numb. xxvii. 15—21. *And Moses spake unto the Lord, saying, Let the Lord, the God of the spirits of all flesh, set a man over the congregation, which may go out before them, and which may go in before them, and which may lead them out, and which may bring them in; that the congregation of the Lord be not as sheep which have no shepherd. And the Lord said unto Moses, Take thee Joshua the son Nun, a man in whom is the Spirit, and lay thine hand upon him; and set him before Eleazar the priest, and before all the congregation: and give him a charge in their sight. And thou shalt put some of thine honour upon him, that all the congregation of the children of Israel may be obedient. And he shall stand before Eleazar the priest, who shall ask counsel for him, after the judgment of Urim before the Lord. At his word they shall go out, and at his word they shall come in, both he, and all the children of Israel with him, even all the congregation.*

WHEN great and good men are taken away, we are apt to suppose that their places cannot be adequately supplied. But God "has the residue of the Spirit," and can raise up instruments at any time to carry on his gracious purposes in the world. When Elijah was taken up to heaven in a fiery chariot, his servant Elisha was ready to imagine, that all the stay and support of Israel was removed; "My father, my father! the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof!" but Elijah's mantle fell upon Elisha. Thus, when Moses had received God's final decision respecting his dying in the wilderness, it seemed as if the nation of Israel would be left as sheep without a shepherd: but God, in answer to the prayer of Moses, appointed one to succeed him, who fulfilled his trust as well as Moses himself could have done.

The points for our present consideration are,

I. The

I. The concern of Moses for the people committed to him—

The last forty years of his life he had spent entirely in their service: and now that he could superintend them no longer, he was anxious that a successor should be appointed by God himself; that so all occasion for rivalship might be cut off, and all discord and anarchy be prevented. In this he acted,

1. As a true patriot—

[Patriotism is a virtue which all public men affect, but which very few possess. Selfishness is by far the more prevailing character. Many, when they can hold the reins of government no longer, would rather be succeeded by one of moderate talents, whose inferiority should cause regret for their departed worth, than by one of transcendent abilities, whose eminence should eclipse their virtues, and cause their services to be forgotten. A regard for their own credit would outweigh their desire for the public weal. Besides, the generality of patriots exert all their influence to aggrandize their own families; and appoint to places of trust and honour, not those whom in their consciences they think most fit for the office, but those who from family or party considerations will most confirm their power, or perpetuate the honour of their name. The very reverse of all this was displayed in the conduct of Moses. He was fearful lest the people should have any reason to regret his loss. He was anxious that a person should be selected and qualified by God himself; that so the administration of their affairs might be conducted to the greatest possible advantage. And though he had children of his own, he placed them in no peculiar situation either of Church or State; but left them to occupy the humbler post of common Levites, whilst Aaron's children succeeded to the Priesthood, and one of another tribe was nominated as his successor in the government. Moreover, *the manner of evincing his concern* for the people's welfare, was such as is little known to modern patriots; he evinced it not by declamatory harangues, but by *praying to God for them.* Happy would it be, if those who in this day make such professions of zeal in the service of their country, would manifest it before God in their secret chamber, intreating HIM to direct their counsels and prosper their endeavours! To secure his direction and blessing for those in power, would be a better proof of patriotism, than to be aiming incessantly at their subversion and ruin.]

2. As a faithful Minister—

[Moses presided over Israel, both as a Church, and as a Nation: and he shewed the same regard for their spiritual, as for their temporal, interests. He well knew, that the appointment of

of a truly religious Governor would equally conduce to their good in both respects. Hence he prayed, that God would set one over them, who should "go in and out before them," leading them by his example, as well as directing them by his authority: and though doubtless this might principally refer to the wars which they were about to wage, yet it certainly comprehended also every part of the Governor's office, whether civil or religious. Such is the prayer which every pious Minister must offer, when he finds the time of his dissolution drawing nigh. He must not be satisfied with having discharged his own duties conscientiously, but must "labour earnestly for them in prayer," desiring to have his flock committed to one, who shall watch over them with diligence, and minister unto them with fidelity; one, who will not merely *direct* them aright, but will *go before* them in the way, as the Eastern shepherds were wont to do. In this he must manifest his resemblance to the Saviour, who "had compassion on the people, because they were as sheep having no shepherd[a]:" in this too he must follow the footsteps of the Apostles, who strove, both by oral and written communications, to perpetuate the effect of their labours[b].]

How pleasing and acceptable this intercession was, we see in,

II. The gracious provision which God made for them—

Here, as in ten thousand instances, God answered without delay the petitions presented to him—

1. He selected a suitable person for the office—

[Take Joshua," says he, "a man in whom is the Spirit." Yes, such are the Magistrates and Ministers whom *God* appoints: he selects those in whom are suitable qualifications for the post assigned them, or, at least, persons whom he himself will fit for their office. A talent for government is implied in this expression, but it implies also real piety; which is absolutely requisite for a due discharge either of the Magisterial or Ministerial office. None can act *for* God, who do not act *from* him, that is, by grace received from him: and consequently, none can make the best use of their authority, who are not taught by the Spirit to use it for the furtherance of religion, and for the glory of God. O that such persons were universally selected to manage the concerns both of Church and State! We might hope for a far richer blessing on the nation at large, and far infinitely greater good to the Church of Christ, if such persons, and such only, were invested with the sword of magistracy, or the pastoral staff. At all events, both Magistrates and Ministers may learn from hence, what qualification they should

[a] Matt. ix. 36. [b] Acts xx. 25—32. 2 Pet. i. 12—15.

should chiefly seek, for a profitable discharge of their respective offices.]

2. He prescribed the mode of his ordination to it—

[" Set him before Eleazar, and before all the congregation," said the Lord; " and lay thine hand upon him, and give him a charge in their sight, and put some of thine honour upon him;" that is, invest him *now*, before thy death, with a part of thine own authority; that all, seeing whom I have chosen, may acknowledge him as their Governor, and render a willing obedience to his commands. This mode of ordaining Joshua was calculated to answer every end that could be wished. It effectually prevented all competition, and strengthened his hands for the arduous employment that was assigned him: and we may well suppose that Joshua would be deeply impressed with these ceremonies, and long retain a remembrance of the charge given him, confirmed as it was by an additional charge from God himself[c]. Nor is this mode of appointing Joshua uninstructive to us; for, a similar mode of consecrating persons to divine offices has ever since obtained in the Church of God. The Deacons who were first ordained by the Apostles, to superintend the temporal concerns of the Church, were set apart in this way[d]: and both Priests and Elders were afterwards consecrated with nearly the same forms[e]. And may we not hope that similar effects are still produced on the minds of many at their solemn consecration to the work of the Ministry? We have no doubt they are: and, on the Ember-days, which are especially set apart for praying to God in behalf of those who are to be ordained, a still richer blessing would rest upon them; and the imposition of hands be accompanied with a more abundant communication of the Holy Spirit to their souls[f].]

3. He promised him all needful assistance in it—

[It must of necessity be, that in the government of that people many cases would arise, wherein he would need direction from above. Moses had on such occasions enjoyed immediate access to the Deity. But another mode of communication had been fixed by God for all succeeding Governors. The Urim and Thummim (which import *light* and *perfection*) were in the breast-plate, which was worn by the High Priest; and by means of that breast-plate, God, in some way unknown to us, revealed his will. To Joshua he particularly promised, that he would communicate to him in this way all needful information: so that, whatever difficulties might arise, he should have infallible means of ascertaining the mind of God. Doubtless that method of obtaining instruction is now at an end: but the prayer of faith will

[c] Deut. xxxi. 7, 8, 14, 15, 23.
[d] Acts vi. 3, 6. [e] 1 Tim. iv. 14. Acts xiv. 23.
[f] Compare Deut. xxxiv. 9. with 2 Tim. i. 6.

will yet prevail, so that God's Ministers and people shall not seek his face in vain. If they truly desire his direction, they shall be preserved from any important error, and be guided into all necessary truth: "The meek he will guide in judgment; the meek he will teach his way."]

From this subject we may clearly LEARN,

1. The blessedness of the Christian Church—

[How happy were the Jews to have such an Intercessor as Moses, and such a Governor as Joshua! Follow Joshua in his course, from the moment of his appointment to the moment of his death: what a series of victories, till he had conquered the land, and distributed it according to the divine purpose! But if we envy the Jews their divinely-appointed Head, what objects of envy must *we* be, who have the Lord Jesus Christ himself for our Head! He is the true Joshua, to whom "the Spirit is given without measure[g]." He also is made "Head of the Church," and is "ascended up on high, that he may fill all things;" and through him the very weakest of his people shall be "more than conquerors." Let us then "be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might," and not doubt but that "he will bruise Satan under our feet shortly."]

2. The duty of advancing in every possible way its best interests—

[If we be Magistrates or Ministers, our duty is proportionably difficult, and our responsibility proportionably awful. O that all who have been placed in such offices, felt as they ought the obligations that are upon them! Let Ministers in particular, who have a far greater charge than that of Magistrates committed to them, give themselves up wholly to the execution of their trust. Let them fear lest the blood of those who die in their sins, be laid to their charge. And let them so fulfil their ministry, that they may give up their account with joy, and not with grief.]

[g] Isai. xi. 2, 3. John iii. 34.

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## CXXVIII.

### THE MORNING AND EVENING SACRIFICE.

Numb. xxviii. 3—10. *Thou shalt say unto them, This is the offering made by fire which ye shall offer unto the Lord; two lambs of the first year without spot, day by day, for a continual burnt-offering. The one lamb shalt thou offer in the morning, and the other lamb shalt thou offer at even; and a tenth part of an ephah of flour for a meat-offering, mingled with the fourth part of an hin of beaten oil. It*

*is*

*is a continual burnt-offering, which was ordained in mount Sinaï for a sweet savour, a sacrifice made by fire unto the Lord. And the drink-offering thereof shall be the fourth part of an hin for the one lamb: in the holy place shalt thou cause the strong wine to be poured out unto the Lord for a drink-offering. And the other lamb shalt thou offer at even: as the meat-offering of the morning, and as the drink-offering thereof, thou shalt offer it, a sacrifice made by fire, of a sweet savour unto the Lord. And on the sabbath-day, two lambs of the first year without spot, and two tenth-deals of flour for a meat-offering, mingled with oil, and the drink-offering thereof. This is the burnt-offering of every sabbath, besides the continual burnt-offering, and his drink-offering.*

THIS burnt-offering, our text informs us, "was ordained in Mount Sinaï," nearly forty years before the period at which it was again enjoined[a]. Commentators are not agreed respecting the reason of its being again so circumstantially repeated. Some have thought that the observance of this ordinance had been entirely neglected in the wilderness; and that from hence arose the necessity of enjoining it again, in order that it might not be neglected when they should come into the land of Canaan. Nor is this opinion without some foundation: for the prophet Amos, and after him the first martyr, Stephen, complains of the most grievous neglect of duty among the Israelites in the wilderness, and of their worshipping idols in preference to the living God: "It is witten in the book of the Prophets, says Stephen, O yè house of Israel, have ye offered to me slain beasts and sacrifices by the space of forty years in the wilderness? Yea, ye took up the tabernacle of Moloch, and the star of your god Remphan, figures which ye made to worship them: and I will carry you away beyond Babylon[b]." But it is altogether incredible that Moses should have suffered such a public dereliction of duty as this: and, if he had, it is impossible that God should have spoken of him as a servant "faithful in all his house." We apprehend therefore that it was not of *these* sacrifices which depended upon Aaron and Moses, but

[a] Exod. xxix. 38—41. [b] Am. v. 25—27. Acts vii. 42, 43.

but of *other* sacrifices which depended more upon the people, and which they had neglected to offer on the proper occasions, that the prophet speaks: and consequently, that there was some other reason for renewing the appointment of the ordinance before us. The true reason seems to be, that, as all who had come out of Egypt, from twenty years old and upward, had perished in the wilderness, and as Aaron was dead, and Moses himself had but two or three months to live, it was desirable that this new generation should have this ordinance enjoined from God himself, that they might be duly impressed with a sense of its great importance. The repetition of it moreover is of use to us, inasmuch as it shews us, that some deep mystery must be contained in it, and that much valuable instruction is to be derived from it. Let us then consider,

I. The matter of which this offering consisted—

There two very distinct offerings united;

1. The lamb—

[This was to be "of the first year," and "without spot;" and it was to be slain, and then consumed by fire upon the altar, as "a sacrifice of a sweet savour unto the Lord."

Can any one doubt what this imported? Can any one fail to see in this a type of the Lord Jesus Christ, whom one Apostle speaks of as "a lamb without blemish, and without spot[c];" and another Apostle represents as "THE Lamb," even "THE Lamb that was slain[d]," to whom all the glorified Saints in heaven ascribe the honour of their salvation, saying, "Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto THE LAMB[e]!" It is worthy of observation, that the very first sacrifices of which any mention is made in Scripture, were *lambs*. It was "of the firstlings of his flock" that Abel offered; and by that offering he obtained very peculiar tokens of God's favour and acceptance[f]. And there is reason to believe, that the skins, with which Adam and Eve were, by God's appointment, clothed immediately after the fall, were of lambs which they had previously offered in sacrifice[g]: and in reference to this early appointment, as well as to the everlasting decrees of God, the Lord Jesus is called "The Lamb slain from the foundation of the world[h]." We shall not detain you in order to point out the correspondence between Christ and these spotless lambs, in the perfection

[c] 1 Pet. i. 19. [d] Rev. v. 8, 9. [e] Rev. vii. 10.
[f] Gen. iv. 4. with Heb. xi. 4. [g] Gen. iii. 21. [h] Rev. xiii. 8.

tion of his nature, in the holiness of his life, or in the intent of his death: but, passing by these things as known and understood among you[i], we shall content ourselves with saying, that, in this offering, there was *virtually* the very same proclamation made to the Jews, as was afterwards *expressly* made by John the Baptist, "Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world[k]!"]

2. The meat-offering and the drink-offering—

[With the lamb a portion of flour, about three quarts, was to be offered, mixed up with somewhat more than a quart of beaten oil: and whilst they and the lamb were burning together upon the altar, some strong generous wine, (of equal quantity with the oil,) was to be poured out as a libation: and the whole together being consumed by fire, was "of sweet savour unto the Lord."

The meaning of this is not so clear as that which relates to the lamb. It may possibly be a tribute, of thanksgiving to God for all his mercies, which are comprehended under the terms, "corn, and wine, and oil:" and, in that view, the ordinance will be a compound of prayer and praise, corresponding with that injunction of St. Paul, "In every thing by prayer and supplication, *with thanksgiving*, let your requests be made known unto God[l]." But we rather suppose that there is an allusion made here to feasts, of which corn and wine and oil were very distinguished parts: and that the consumption of these upon the altar was intended to convey the idea, that God himself feasted with his people, and would always meet them with tokens of his love, whensoever they came to him as sinners, trusting in the atonement that should in due time be offered for them. This interpretation is clearly countenanced by the gracious promises which God made, when first he instituted this ordinance on Mount Sinaï; saying, "There will I meet you, to speak there unto thee: and there will I meet with the children of Israel; and the tabernacle shall be sanctified by my glory[m]." In this view the ordinance is most instructive; in that it announces the truths proclaimed afterwards by the voice of Christ himself, "No man cometh unto the Father but by ME;" and, "him that cometh unto ME, I will in no wise cast out[n]."]

That which distinguishes this offering from all others will be found particularly in,

II. The manner in which it was presented—

Many offerings were only occasional; but this was

[i] If this Discourse were delivered in a congregation that was unaccustomed to hear such subjects treated of, the parallel should be distinctly drawn. [k] John i. 29, 36. [l] Phil. iv. 6.
[m] Exod. xxix. 42, 43. [n] John vi. 37. & xiv. 6.

was stated, and was renewed daily throughout the year. The things to which we would more particularly call your attention are,

1. The union of the different materials—

[Meat-offerings and drink-offerings were indeed sometimes offered with other sacrifices; and sometimes also by themselves: but here they were constantly presented and consumed with the lamb. Now, if we regard them as expressions of gratitude to God, they shew, that with our acknowledgments of guilt we should invariably render unto God a tribute of praise. If, on the other hand, we regard them as presented unto God in order that by the consumption of them on his altar he may express, as it were, his communion with us, and his acceptance of us, then they shew, that, in our applications for mercy through the Redeemer's sacrifice, we should draw nigh to God with a confidence of finding favour in his sight. Now such an union of feelings and dispositions in our hearts is most desirable. We are not so to lean to the side of humiliation as to encourage despondency, nor so to confide in God as to lose all our tenderness and contrition: but we should at all times "rejoice with trembling[o]," and tremble with rejoicing.]

2. The frequency with which they were offered—

[Every morning and every evening were they to be offered throughout the year; and from this circumstance they were called "a *continual* burnt-offering." Now there were two things in particular, which this circumstance was calculated to impress on the people's minds; the one was their *continual need* of an atoning sacrifice; the other was, the *continued efficacy* of that which should in due time be offered. Not a day past but they were repeatedly reminded, even the whole congregation, that they were sinners before God, and must seek salvation through Him whom this offering typified: (O that *we* also might bear in mind that salutary lesson!) they were reminded too that there was in this sacrifice a sufficiency for the sins of the whole world. Not the greatest sinner in all Israel was excepted, if he did but really with penitential sorrow seek for pardon in this way: nor, as long as the world shall stand, shall any one plead the merits of the Redeemer's sacrifice in vain. The shadows were repeated, because they were shadows: but Christ who is the substance, has made a complete atonement for the sins of the whole world, and "by one offering of himself hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified[p]."]

3. The increase of them on the sabbath-day—

[This is particularly noticed in the text: the lambs, and the meat and drink-offerings, were doubled on that day. What a reve-

[o] Ps. ii. 11. [p] Heb. x. 14.

a reverence for the sabbath was this calculated to inspire! It shewed to all, that though that day is a day of rest from worldly business, it ought to be a day of peculiar exertion in the things of God. Then should all the faculties of the soul be summoned to the service, or, I should rather say, to the enjoyment, of God. We should keep a holy feast unto him, and seek a more abundant measure of communion with him. In the closet, in the family, in the public assembly, we should be endeavouring to advance his glory: in a word, we should labour to spend the whole day, as it were, in "fellowship with him, and with his Son, Jesus Christ." Not that we need to be all the day in *acts* of devotion; it is the *habit*, which we should particularly attend to; and we may vary our services, so as to render them all more easy and delightful——— Shall it be thought that under the Gospel this strictness is not necessary? We answer, that, though the ceremonial part of the sabbath is superseded, the moral part remains; and, on that, as well as every other day, our sacrifices, instead of being diminished, should be increased. It is of the times of the Gospel that Ezekiel speaks, though in terms taken from the law: and the attentive Reader will see, that more is required of us than of the Jews; and that both our services and enjoyments should be augmented in proportion to our superior advantages[q]. Let not us be sparing of our services, and God will not be sparing of his communications[r].]

[q] Ezek. xlvi. 14. on common days; & ib. 4, 5. on the sabbath-day.
[r] Isai. lxiv. 5.

## CXXIX.

### DESTRUCTION OF THE MIDIANITES.

Numb. xxxi. 48—50. *And the officers which were over thousands of the host, the captains of thousands, and captains of hundreds, came near unto Moses: and they said unto Moses, Thy servants have taken the sum of the men of war which are under our charge, and there lacketh not one man of us. We have therefore brought an oblation for the Lord, what every man hath gotten, of jewels of gold, chains, and bracelets, rings, ear-rings, tablets, to make an atonement for our souls before the Lord.*

NUMBERLESS are the occasions on which we are led to admire the condescension of God towards his chosen servants: and one of considerable importance occurs in the chapter before us. He had doomed Moses to die in the wilderness without ever

ever setting his foot upon the promised land: and the time was nearly come for the execution of the sentence upon him. But God graciously determined to give him an earnest of those blessings which were shortly to be poured out on the surviving generation. He therefore directed Moses to "avenge the children of Israel of the Midianites, before he should be gathered unto his people." Moses gives immediate orders to carry into effect the divine command: but he remarkably alters the language which Jehovah had used. *God* had said, "Avenge *the children of Israel* of the Midianites:" and *he* says, "Avenge *the Lord* of Midian." The Lord marked his tender concern for Israel's good; but Moses shewed a paramount concern for the glory of his God[a]. Thus it is that the condescension and kindness of God should ever be received: and whilst He seeks the best interests of his people, we should seek his glory above every other consideration: to *that* every interest of ours should be subordinated.

The order being issued, a thousand from every tribe went forth to battle: (for, when God was with them, it was alike easy to subdue their enemies with many or with few:) and Phinehas, who had displayed his zeal for God in the matter of Zimri and Cozbi, was sent with them, to animate their exertions. We have no particular account of the engagement; but the consequences of it are minutely detailed, and may, not unprofitably, be distinctly considered. We notice,

I. Their victory over Midian—

[This was most complete. All the five kings who came out against them were slain; and all their forces destroyed. That all Midian did not come to the battle, appears from this, that in two hundred years afterwards they were again a powerful nation: but all who engaged in this conflict were destroyed, their cities also were taken, and their fortresses demolished. "Balaam also," who, though foiled in his former endeavours, had returned to them, "was slain amongst them with the sword."

Now this victory is instructive, whether we regard it in an historical, or typical, view. *As an historical fact*, it teaches us, that no power can withstand the arm of the Lord; that, when aided

[a] Compare ver. 2, & 3.

aided by him, we are infallibly sure of victory; and that all who determinately set themselves against him shall perish. They may boast of their knowledge, and may wish to "die the death of the righteous;" but they shall surely be numbered with the enemies of God at last. *As a type*, it shews us what shall ultimately be the fate of all our spiritual enemies. Our strength may appear as nothing in comparison of theirs; but it shall prevail, and our exertions be crowned with perfect victory.]

## II. Their slaughter of the captives—

[On the return of the Israelites from battle, Moses went forth to meet them; but finding that they had not slain the women with the men, but had taken them, together with the male children, captives, he was much displeased; and ordered them to destroy all, except the females who were virgins. Our natural compassion for the weak and helpless makes us to shudder at such an order as this: and to wonder how the soldiers could be induced to carry it into execution. But we must remember that God has a right over his creatures, to take them away at any time and in any manner that he sees fit. Whether he sweep them away by a pestilence, or cut them off by the sword, he is no more to be accused of harshness towards them, than if he take them away by the more common means of disease and age. It must be remembered too, that the women in particular had forfeited their lives by tempting the Israelites to whoredom and idolatry. Already had they occasioned the destruction of 24,000 Israelites; and, if suffered to live, might have successfully renewed their former practices. It was necessary therefore in that view also to cut them off, both mothers and daughters indiscriminately; all having, either by action or connivance, been accessary to Israel's ruin. As for the male children, they, though not actually involved in their parents' iniquities, were justly, as in almost all cases they must be, involved in their parents' punishment. With respect to the Israelites themselves, they were no more to be blamed, than any persons are who act as executioners under the orders of the Civil Magistrate. No one condemns the jury who by their verdict subject their fellow-creatures to the penalty of death; nor the judge who pronounces sentence; nor the jailer who confines the criminal; nor the officers who attend the execution; nor the man that employs the instrument of death. No one condemns the angel who destroyed the Egyptian first-born, nor him who in one night slew 185,000 of the Assyrian army: nor can any one justly condemn the Israelites, who executed the divine command in the slaughter of their captives. The case was peculiar, and not applicable to modern warfare; nor was it intended as an *example* to us: but, as a *lesson*, it is of great importance; since it shews us, that peculiar judgments await those who tempt others to sin: and that, though they may escape for a

time, the most signal vengeance shall fall on them at last. It teaches us also (for this, as well as the foregoing, circumstance admits of a *typical* application) that we must destroy *all* our spiritual enemies without exception; not those only that seem more immediately to menace our destruction, but those also, which, though apparently weak and insignificant, may warp us from our duty, or in time become strong and formidable.]

III. Their dedication of the spoils—

[Immense were the spoils taken on this occasion: and the distribution of them which God appointed, seemed to afford universal satisfaction. Half was given to the congregation at large, and half was reserved for the host that took them. From each was a tribute taken for God: from the half belonging to the congregation, a fiftieth part; and from that belonging to the warriors, a five hundredth part. This shews us, that God must have a portion of all that his providence has allotted to us: whether we earn it ourselves, or receive it as the fruit of others' labour, God must be acknowledged in it, and be glorified with it.

But, on mustering the troops, a most wonderful fact was ascertained. Notwithstanding only 12,000 went to the war, and the enemy whom they attacked were so numerous, and their success had been so great, not one single man was missing from their ranks. This filled them with utter astonishment, and with the most lively gratitude: and all with one accord desired to make their acknowledgments to God, by dedicating to him a part, if not the whole, of the gold and jewels which they had taken, every man for himself. Accordingly, the whole of the spoil having been purified either by fire or water, and the soldiers themselves also having been purified from the pollution which the slaughter of so many persons, and the touching of the dead, had occasioned, the gold and jewels were presented unto God for the service of his sanctuary, "*as an atonement for their souls.*" The word "atonement" which is here used, is not to be understood as importing *an expiatory sacrifice*, but only (as it is afterwards explained) "*a memorial.*" These spoils were presented, precisely as the half shekel, or "atonement-money," was appointed to be, in commemoration of a most wonderful deliverance[b]. The Israelites presented them, first, as *an acknowledgment of their desert;* (for they deserved death, no less than the people whom they had destroyed:) next, as *a memorial of their deliverance;* (which was truly astonishing;) and lastly, as *a testimony of their gratitude;* a sense of which they desired to retain to the end of life; and to transmit to their latest posterity.

O that there were in all of us such an heart! that we could see in such a view our obligations to God! and that we were thus forward to express our sense of them in every possible way!

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[b] Exod. xxx. 12—16.

The preservation of *our* lives is not indeed so manifest, as in their case; but it is not at all less the work of God. Think of the diseases and accidents to which *we* have been exposed, and the havoc made by them on those around us; and you shall see that we, no less than the Israelites, are indebted for our lives to the good providence of our God. Apply the same thought to our *souls*; and then say, whether we have not as abundant calls for gratitude, as they——— How then shall we testify our gratitude to God? I answer, Whatsoever he has given to us for a prey, *that* let us present to him for a sacrifice of thanksgiving. Has he given us time, and health, and money, and influence; and, above all, has he infused an heavenly life into our souls? let us devote it all to him, and "glorify him with our bodies and our spirits which are his." The Israelites thought their jewels would be ill employed as ornaments for their wives or daughters, when they might be of use for the service and honour of God: thus should we also estimate whatever we possess; not by the gratification it will afford to our pride and vanity, but by the good it will enable us to do to our fellow-creatures, and the service in which it may be employed for our heavenly Benefactor. This only would I observe in relation to it, that we must *first* give up *ourselves* to God, and *then* our *property*[c]. Without our hearts no sacrifice whatever will be accepted of him: but if we "give *ourselves* to him as living sacrifices, we shall perform a holy, a reasonable, and an acceptable service[d]:" and every victory we gain, together with every blessing we enjoy, whether public and national, or private and personal, demands it at our hands.]

[c] 2 Cor. viii. 5. [d] Rom. xii. 1.

## CXXX.

### MOSES REPROVES THE REUBENITES.

Numb. xxxii. 6, 7. *And Moses said unto the children of Gad, and to the children of Reuben, Shall your brethren go to war, and shall ye sit here? And wherefore discourage ye the heart of the children of Israel from going over into the land which the Lord hath given them?*

ACTIONS are good or evil according to the motives from which they proceed: but, as these are known only to God, it must often happen that our conduct is either viewed in too favourable a light, or subjected to unmerited censure. Our inability to dive into the hearts of men should certainly incline us at all times to lean rather to the side of charity,

and to hope and believe all things of a favourable nature, as far as circumstances will admit. This consideration however is not to operate so far as to blind our eyes to what is manifesly evil, or to keep us from reproving those who act amiss. Magistrates in particular must proceed with firmness in suppressing wickedness of every kind, and by timely interference must stop the contagion of bad example. Thus did Moses, when the Reubenites and Gadites presented a request to him, which he deemed injurious to all the other tribes. They asked to have the land on the east side of Jordan for their portion, instead of any part of the land of Canaan: and Moses, conceiving their request to proceed from improper and unjustifiable motives, expostulated with them, and reproved them with great severity. Let us consider,

I. The grounds of his jealousy—

There was ample reason for the fears he entertained respecting them—

[Their request seemed to be dictated by *selfishness, worldliness*, and *unbelief*. As soon as Sihon king of the Amorites, and Og the king of Bashan were subdued, and their fertile territories were seized, these two tribes requested to have the exclusive possession of their land, under a pretence that it was pre-eminently suited to them, on account of the number of their flocks and herds. As for their brethren belonging to the other ten tribes, let *them* go and fight their way among the Canaanites, and get possession of whatever they could: but the land which was already subdued, and which was of the richest quality, they desired to have allotted to themselves without any further trouble.

This land was not within the precincts of Canaan: moreover, it would be far removed from the ordinances of religion and from the house of God: but they did not seem to regard either of these considerations in comparison of an ample, easy, and immediate settlement.

The inhabitants of the promised land were exceeding numerous and warlike; and could never be dispossessed without many sanguinary contests. Perhaps, after all, the victory over them might be dearly purchased, or possibly might never be attained: hence also might arise the willingness of the suitors to forego their share in what was uncertain, if they might be permitted to possess what was already gained.

Such was the construction which Moses put upon the conduct of

of these two tribes, and such was the ground of those reproofs which he administered.]

And is there not ground for similar fears whenever a similar conduct obtains?

[If a Minister at this day see his hearers *selfish*, mindful of their own comforts, but inattentive to the wants and miseries of others, has he not reason to fear concerning them? When it is eminently characteristic of the true Christian to "mind, not his own things, but the things of others[a]," and there is a manifest failure in this respect amongst his people, ought he not to be "jealous over them with a godly jealousy," and to warn them of their self-deceit?

Again, if he observe any professors of religion to have become *worldly*; if he find them so intent on their present interests, as to be comparatively indifferent about the ordinances of religion, and the ultimate possession of the heavenly land; if he see them studious of their present ease, and averse to spiritual conflicts, must he not of necessity "stand in doubt of" such persons? Does not love itself require him to "change his voice towards them, and to adopt the language of admonition and reproof?

Once more, if he see them yielding to *unbelief*, and resting satisfied with a present portion, through desponding apprehensions respecting the attainment of a better inheritance, does it become him to be silent? Ought he not to exert himself in every way to repress such a spirit, and to stimulate his people to a more becoming conduct? Must he wait for open and notorious transgressions before he opens his lips in expostulations and reproofs? No surely: the example of Moses in the text, and of St. Paul on various occasions[b], shews, what are the emotions which every such instance should produce, and what methods every faithful Minister should adopt to counteract such evils.]

Whilst we justify Moses on reviewing the grounds of his jealousy, we shall find reason to congratulate him on,

II. The effects of it—

From himself it produced a faithful remonstrance—

[It is but too common to express our fears and jealousies to others, and to conceal them from the person who is the subject of them. But Moses abhorred any such concealment: he felt the importance of suggesting all his fears to those who were most interested in being made acquainted with them; and he accordingly addressed himself to the people themselves.

He set before them the pernicious tendency of their example, which was calculated to discourage all the children of Israel: he also reminded them of the similar conduct of their fathers, which had

[a] Phil. ii. 4. [b] 2 Cor. xi. 2. Gal. iv. 19, 20.

had involved them all in one common ruin; and assured them, that they would bring a similar destruction on the present generation, if they persisted in such unreasonable desires[c].

Thus he acted like a true friend, and a faithful servant of the Lord. It was thus that St. Paul also acted towards Peter, when by a temporizing and timid policy he was endangering the liberty of the Christian Church: and thus also are we to act, agreeably to that precept, "Thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and shalt not suffer sin upon him[d]."]

From them it called forth a satisfactory explanation—

[They did not, on the one hand, either acknowledge, or deny, the fault imputed to them; nor on the other hand, did they take the slightest offence at it. But for the satisfaction of Moses they voluntarily engaged to accompany their brethren in arms, and even to go before them to the battle; and to continue with them till the whole land should be subdued, and every tribe should be in possession of its destined inheritance. This was fair and equitable: and Moses readily acquiesced in the proposal. He warned them however, that, if they should ever recede from their purpose, and violate their engagement, "their sin should surely find them out," and be visited upon them.

Thus were matters settled to the satisfaction of all parties: the jealousy of Moses evinced his concern for their welfare; and, if it did not give birth to the proposal which was made, it certainly confirmed the people in their determination to execute it with boldness and fidelity. A similar instance of jealousy towards these very tribes occurred, when they were returning to their families after the conquest of Canaan[e]. On that occasion indeed they were evidently blameless, notwithstanding the appearances were, as in the present case, very much against them. But the issue in both was happy: and we learn from both to admonish with candour, and to receive admonitions with humble gratitude; being more intent on satisfying the minds of those who are offended, than on lowering our accusers by any recriminations.]

This subject will naturally furnish us with some important HINTS:—

1. Maintain on all occasions a jealousy over yourselves—

[The heart is justly said to be "deceitful above all things:" and "Satan can easily transform himself into an angel of light." Even the Apostles themselves on some occasions "knew not what spirit they were of:" they supposed themselves actuated by pure and holy zeal, when they were influenced by nothing but

[c] ver. 6—15. [d] Lev. xix. 17. [e] Josh. xxii. 11—33.

but pride and revenge. It is highly probable that these two tribes took credit to themselves for far more disinterestedness than they possessed; and that Moses saw more of their real disposition, than they themselves were aware of. This appears from the solemn charge which Moses gave them, even after he had acceded to their proposal. And we are sure that this is frequently the case amongst ourselves: under the idea of a prudential regard for our families and our property, we are very apt to indulge a worldly and selfish spirit; and to be unconscious of evils which are but too visible to others. Let us remember this: we see it in others; let us guard against it in ourselves — — — ]

2. Be ready to assign the reasons of your conduct to others—

[It may easily happen that our conduct may appear to others in a more unfavourable light than it ought; and if they knew our real views, they would form a different judgment respecting it. Now then we should not be angry with them because they express their doubts respecting any particular action; but should be ready to satisfy their minds, precisely as we would, if they inquired into the grounds of our faith[f]. The Apostle Peter, when called to an account by all the other Apostles for "going to uncircumcised Gentiles and eating with them," thought it no degradation to assign his reasons to them, but was glad of an opportunity of removing their misapprehensions[g]. Though they seemed to have been somewhat hasty in condemning him, he was not angry with them: he knew the purity of their motives, and felt a pleasure in declaring to them the designs of God towards the Gentile world. Happy would it be for us, if there were in all of us such a mind as this. But, alas! the quick sensibility which is manifested by us when any fault is pointed out; our extreme backwardness to acknowledge it, and our proneness to condemn our monitors rather than ourselves; render the duty of admonishing one another extremely difficult. Let us however cultivate a better spirit, and "esteem it a kindness, if the righteous smite and reprove us:" let us receive their admonitions "as an excellent oil, which shall not break our head[h]," but rather heal the wounds which our own misconduct may have occasioned.]

3. Endeavour so to walk, that your actions may carry their own evidence along with them—

[In some circumstances our actions must of necessity be open to misconstruction. St. Paul in circumcising Timothy and not Titus, and in "becoming all things to all men," must appear to many to be guilty of inconsistency. But his general spirit would bear such ample testimony to the integrity of his mind, that all candid persons must at least withhold their censures, even when

[f] 1 Pet. iii. 15. [g] Acts xi. 2—4. [h] Ps. cxli. 5.

when they could not discern the exact propriety of his conduct. Where there was real danger of his laying a stumbling-block before others, he invariably leaned to the safer side, and would deny himself in things that were most innocent, rather than by indulgence ensnare the consciences of others[i]. Thus should we endeavour to act. We should "abstain from all appearance of evil." We should be careful that our "good may not be evil spoken of[k]." In a word, we should "be circumspect in all things;" and "so make our light to shine before men, that all who behold it may be constrained to glorify our Father which is in heaven."]

[i] 1 Cor. viii. 13. [k] Rom. xiv. 16.

## CXXXI.

### THE CITIES OF REFUGE.

Numb. xxxv. 24—28. *The congregation shall judge between the slayer and the revenger of blood, according to these judgments: and the congregation shall deliver the slayer out of the hand of the revenger of blood, and the congregation shall restore him to the city of his refuge, whither he was fled; and he shall abide in it unto the death of the high priest, which was anointed with the holy oil. But if the slayer shall at any time come without the border of the city of his refuge, whither he was fled; and the revenger of blood find him without the borders of the city of his refuge, and the revenger of blood kill the slayer, he shall not be guilty of blood; because he should have remained in the city of his refuge until the death of the high priest: but after the death of the high priest the slayer shall return into the land of his possession.*

THE impartial administration of justice is one of the richest blessings that result from civilization and good government. It counteracts the evil which might otherwise arise from inequality of rank and fortune, and, without levelling the distinctions which are necessary for the well-being of society, prevents the abuse of them. It keeps every member of the community in his proper place and station: it protects the rich from the rapacity of the envious, and the poor from the oppression of the proud: and, while it imposes on all a salutary restraint, it gives to all personal security and mutual confidence. Supposing therefore that the inspired volume had made

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no provision for the administration of justice, it would have been expedient to establish such an order of things as should maintain the rights of men inviolate, or inflict condign punishment on the aggressors. But God has graciously admitted this subject into the code which he has given us: he has put honour upon those who are appointed to preside in judgment: he has declared them to be his own Representatives and Vicegerents upon earth: he has required the utmost deference to be paid them, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake; and has on some occasions ratified their decisions by extraordinary dispensations of his providence[a]. The protecting of the innocent, and the punishing of the guilty, were objects of especial care in the government which he himself established upon earth. This appears, as from a variety of other ordinances, so particularly from the appointment of cities of refuge, whither persons, who had accidentally or wilfully taken away the life of a fellow-creature, might flee for safety till the matter should be examined, and the judgment of the congregation declared respecting it.

This enactment, which is to be the subject of the present Discourse, may be considered in a two-fold view; namely, *as a civil ordinance*, and *as a typical institution*.

First let us consider the appointment of cities of refuge *as a civil ordinance*: and for the sake of perspicuity we will begin with explaining the nature and intent of the ordinance, and then make such remarks upon it as our peculiar circumstances require.

The ordinance was simply this. There were to be six cities separated at convenient distances, three on either side of Jordan, that any persons who had occasioned the death of a fellow-creature might flee to one or other of them for safety, till the circumstances of the case should be investigated, and his guilt or innocence be ascertained. The person next of

[a] In the destruction of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram.

of kin to him that was killed, was permitted to avenge the blood of his relation in case he overtook the slayer before he reached the place of refuge; but, when the slayer had got within the gates of the city, he was safe: nevertheless the Magistrates were to carry him back to the town or village where the transaction had taken place; and to institute an inquiry into his conduct. Then, if it appeared that he had struck the deceased person in wrath or malice, (*whether with any kind of weapon, or without one,*) he was adjudged to be a murderer, and was delivered up to justice; and the near relative of the murdered person was to be his executioner: if, on the contrary, it was found that he had been unwittingly and unintentionally accessary to the person's death, he was restored to the city whither he had fled, and was protected there from any further apprehensions of the avenger's wrath. Nevertheless he was, as it were, a prisoner at large in that city: he was on no account to go out of it: if the avenger should at any time find him without the borders of the city, he was at liberty to kill him. This imprisonment continued during the life of the high priest; but at his death it ceased; and the slayer was at liberty to return to his family and friends. This part of the ordinance was probably intended to put honour upon the high priest, whose death was to be considered as a public calamity, in the lamenting of which all private resentments were to be swallowed up.

Such was the ordinance itself:—we now come to the intention of it. The shedding of human blood has ever been regarded by God with the utmost abhorrence. The first murderer indeed was spared in consequence of a divine mandate; but not from clemency, but rather, that he might be to the newly-created world a living monument of God's wrath and indignation. The edict given to Noah says expressly, "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed." But, as there must of course be different degrees of guilt, according to the

the circumstances under which any person might be killed, God appointed this method of securing protection to the innocent, and punishment to the guilty. The accomplishing of these two objects was, I say, the direct end which the Deity proposed. Provision was thus made that disinterested and experienced Judges should have the cause brought before them, and determine it according to evidence: if the man were guilty, and declared to be so on the evidence of *two* witnesses, he must die: whatever were his rank in life, he must die: no commutation of punishment could possibly be admitted. If the man were innocent, or were not convicted by the testimony of *two* witnesses, (for no man was to be put to death on the testimony of *one* witness only,) the whole congregation were bound to secure him from the effects of animosity and vindictive wrath. Yet even in the protection thus afforded to the man-slayer, there were many circumstances which were intended to mark God's abhorrence of murder: for though no blame attached to the man who had unwittingly slain his neighbour, yet he must leave all that was dear to him, and flee in danger of his life to the city of refuge, and continue there a prisoner, perhaps as long as he lived, and certainly to the death of the high priest: nor could his confinement there be dispensed with: there was no more commutation of sentence allowed for him, than for the murderer himself. The injunctions of God relative to this deserve particular notice: "Ye shall take no satisfaction for the life of a murderer, which is guilty of death; but he shall be surely put to death. And ye shall take no satisfaction for him that is fled to the city of his refuge; that he should come again and dwell in the land, until the death of the priest. So ye shall not pollute the land wherein ye are: for BLOOD DEFILETH THE LAND, AND THE LAND CANNOT BE CLEANSED OF THE BLOOD THAT IS SHED THEREIN, BUT BY THE BLOOD OF HIM THAT SHED IT."

In the remarks that we shall have occasion to make

make on this ordinance, we must of necessity be more particular than we could wish: but in all that we may say upon this most interesting subject, we beg to be understood, not as presuming to criminate any individual, but as declaring in general terms what we believe to be agreeable to the mind of God, and what we are bound in conscience to declare with all faithfulness.

That there is an ardent wish in all our Legislators, and in all who superintend the execution of the laws, to maintain the strictest equity, none can can doubt: a conviction of it is rooted in the mind of every Briton; and the bitterest enemies of our country are compelled to acknowledge it. But in some respects there is in our laws an awful departure from the laws of God; I should rather say, a direct opposition to them[b]: I allude to the murders that are committed in duels, and which have greatly, and increasingly, defiled our land. It has been said, and with too much reason, that our laws are sanguinary. They doubtless are so in many instances; but on the subject of duelling, whether from the laws themselves, or from the influence of those who administer them, or from the connivance of those who are sworn to give a verdict according to them, they are criminally lax: and on this account, as well as for the cruelties of the slave-trade, God has a controversy with us. I know that political expediency is urged in support of both these evils: but what have we to do with expediency in express opposition

[b] Adultery, by the law of God, was punished with death, with the death of both the offenders: but by our laws the penalties attach only, or principally, when the crime is committed by the wife, and then only on her paramour. That the penalties have on some occasions been heavy, we confess; but never once too heavy. Yet from the nature of the pecuniary mulct, it happens, that the very penalty itself may in some cases contribute to the evil which it is intended to repress; to *repress* I say, rather than to *punish*; for, if public report may be credited, the penalty recently adjudged was expressly said to be, not a punishment inflicted on the offender, but a compensation to the injured party. In this view the crime is never punished as a crime, when no less a punishment than death was by God's law to be awarded to it.

opposition to the commands of God? Let me recall to your minds that declaration of God already cited, that "blood defileth the land, and that the blood that is shed therein cannot be cleansed but by the blood of him that shed it:" and let me turn your attention to another passage, which I would to God that every Senator might hear, yea that it might reach the ears of Majesty itself, forasmuch as it would reflect no inconsiderable light on the circumstances in which we are involved: you will find it written in 2 Kings xxiv. 2—4. "The Lord sent against him (the king of Judah) bands of the Chaldees, and bands of the Syrians, and bands of the Moabites, and bands of the children of Ammon, and sent them against Judah to destroy it.... Surely *at the commandment of the Lord came this upon Judah*, to remove them out of his sight, for the sins of Manasseh, according to all that he did; and also for the innocent blood that he shed, (for he filled Jerusalem with innocent blood) *which the Lord would not pardon.*" The Jews probably ascribed the INVASION of their country to the cupidity or anger of the Babylonish monarch: and we also may trace our present dangers to the insatiable ambition of a Tyrant: but in our case, as well as theirs, it is certain, that "*at the commandment of the Lord* all this is come upon us:" and the same reason also may be assigned, "Our land is defiled with blood," with the blood of thousands of our fellow-creatures in Africa, and with the blood of murderous duellists in our own land; with "blood (I say) *which the Lord will not pardon.*" Moreover, these iniquities must be considered as sanctioned by the Legislature, because they who alone have the power, adopt no measures to cleanse the land from these horrible defilements. God therefore has taken the matter into his own hands, and has stirred up once more our inveterate enemies to avenge his quarrel.* The time is come when he is about to "make inquisition for blood," and when he will require at our hands both the

* This was an Assize Sermon, preached at Cambridge, July, 1803.

the innocent blood that we have shed, and the guilty blood which we have forborne to shed. O that we might take warning ere it be too late; and put away the evils which are likely to involve us in utter ruin!

Thus it appears that the ordinance before us is by no means uninstructive, or irrelevant to the present occasion, when God's Representatives in judgment are about to investigate causes, and to execute the laws. And we hope that in delivering our sentiments on such momentous concerns we shall not be thought to have exceeded our province, or to have transgressed the rules which modesty, combined with faithfulness, would prescribe.

But we are to consider the appointment of these cities of refuge in another view also; namely, (II.) *As a typical institution.*—The whole of the Mosaic economy was "a shadow of good things to come;" and the typical import of it is illustrated at large in the Epistle to the Hebrews. Of course it cannot be expected that every particular part of it should be opened to us with the same precision. What was most essential to the understanding of Christianity, was explained to us fully, and the parallel drawn by an infallible hand. What was less necessary, was merely referred to, without any express delineation of its import; its signification being clearly to be gathered from the light reflected on other parts, and from the analogy of faith.

There is not much said respecting the typical import of the cities of refuge; yet there are plain and manifest allusions to it. The Prophet says, "Turn to your strong hold, ye prisoners of hope;" in which words he marks the precise state of those who had fled to the cities, as "prisoners of hope." St. Paul speaks of Christians as "fleeing for refuge to the hope set before them;" wherein he alludes not only to the cities themselves, but to the care taken to keep the roads leading to them in good repair[c], and by direction-posts to point it out to those, who, if retarded by obstacles, or detained by inquiries, might

[c] Deut. xix. 3.

might lose their lives. Again, alluding to the danger of those who should be found out of the borders of the city, he expresses his earnest desire to "be found in Christ." But in explaining images of this kind there is need of much caution and sobriety, lest, while we endeavour to illustrate Scripture, we give occasion to the adversary to regard it as fanciful and absurd. We are however in no danger of exceeding the limits of sober interpretation, if we say that the cities of refuge were intended to teach us three things;—

That we are all obnoxious unto death;

That there is one only way for our escape; and,

That they who flee to the appointed refuge are safe for ever.

That we are all obnoxious unto death, is plain to every one that acknowledges the authority of Scripture. We all are sinners: as sinners, we are condemned by the holy law of God; which says, "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them." We are therefore in the situation of the man-slayer, pursued by him whose right it is to avenge himself on us for our transgressions. Whether our transgressions have been more or less heinous, his right is the same, and our danger is the same, if we be overtaken by his avenging arm. We may urge many pleas in extenuation of our guilt; but they will be of no avail. We may not have been so bad as others; but we "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God:"—"every mouth therefore must be stopped, and all the world become guilty before God." The very calling of Christ by the name, Saviour, is a plain confession, that in ourselves we are lost; for "he came to save only that which was lost."

Further proof of this being unnecessary, we proceed to observe next, That there is but one way for our escape.—There were many cities in Canaan; but none afforded protection to the man-slayer, except those

those which had been separated for that express purpose. We too may think that there are many refuges for us; but all, except one, will be found "refuges of lies, which will be swept away with the besom of destruction." Repentances, Reformations, Alms-deeds, are all good and proper in their place; but none of them, nor all together, can ward off the sword of divine vengeance, or afford security to our souls. Christ is the only refuge: his blood alone can expiate our guilt: "his name is the tower to which we are to run for safety;" "neither is there any other name given under heaven whereby we can be saved." The man-slayer might perchance escape the vigilance of the avenger, or, if overtaken, might successfully withstand him: but who can elude the search of the Almighty, or resist his power? The hope is vain. We must flee to Christ, or perish for ever.

The urgency of the case is methinks a sufficient reason for our fleeing to Christ with all expedition. But if we need any further stimulus, let us reflect on the next hint suggested by the text; namely, That they who flee to the appointed refuge are safe for ever.—The man-slayer might stand within the gates of the city, and defy the threats of his adversary: for the whole city were pledged for his security. And may not the sinner who has taken refuge in Christ, behold without alarm the threatenings of the law, secured as he is by the promise and oath of Jehovah? From the city of refuge indeed they who had committed wilful murder were brought forth for execution. But was ever one cast out who came to Christ? Was ever one taken from that sanctuary in order that he might suffer the sentence of the law? It is possible that through the remissness of the magistrates the rights of those privileged cities might be violated: but who shall violate the engagements of Jehovah? Who shall break in to destroy a sinner lodged in the bosom of his Lord? God himself assures us, that "there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus."

There

There is however a striking and salutary intimation given us, respecting the necessity not only of fleeing to Christ, but of *abiding in* him. If the man-slayer for one moment ventured beyond the bounds of the city, he lost his privilege, and became exposed to the wrath of the avenger. Thus, if after we have escaped, as we think, from the vengeance of our God, we grow insensible of our guilt and danger, and do not carefully, by renewed applications to the Saviour, abide in him, we expose ourselves to the most imminent peril: for, as "we can not escape if we neglect so great salvation," so neither can we, "if we sin wilfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth: there will remain nothing for us then but a fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation to consume us." Our situation will even be worse than ever; and "our latter end be worse than the beginning: for it would have been better never to have known the way of righteousness, than after we have known it to turn from the holy commandment delivered to us."

Permit me then to address you all as in the situation before described, (for none of us will presume to deny that we are sinners, or that, as sinners, we are obnoxious to the divine displeasure); and let me intreat you all to flee from the wrath to come. Let these principles be universally acknowledged amongst us, and deeply rooted in our hearts—That there is no refuge but in Christ—That all self-righteous methods of obtaining mercy will prove fallacious—That every one must feel his guilt and danger, and, like the man-slayer when pursued by the avenger, flee as for his life, renouncing all things whatsoever that may impede his flight and endanger his soul. Pleasures, interests, friends, must all give way to this great concern; and all regard for them must be swallowed up in *this*, the one thing needful. To obtain an interest in Christ must be our great, our only care: we must "count all things but loss that we may win Christ and be found IN him." The city of refuge was open day and night, and to a heathen sojourner as well as to the native Jew: in

the same manner also is Christ accessible to us at all times, and his mercy shall be extended to all who flee unto him. The cities of refuge were so situated, that any one at the remotest corner of the land might reach one of them in less than half a day: and is not Jesus also "nigh to all that call upon him?" Yes all, whether in this land, or in the most distant quarter of the globe, may come to him in one single hour, or, if I may so speak, in one single moment: for the soul that unfeignedly relies on him for pardon and acceptance, is inclosed by him as in an impregnable fortress, and shall be "saved by him with an everlasting salvation." Yet it is not sufficient to flee to him once: we must be daily and hourly fleeing to him in the habit of our minds: in other words, we must "abide in him," by the continual exercise of faith, even to the latest hour of our lives: then shall the death of our great High Priest be available for our discharge, and we shall be restored to the complete and everlasting enjoyment of our friends, our liberty, and our inheritance.

Hitherto we have enforced the subject from topics suited to all persons in all ages of the world: but we cannot conclude without adding a few considerations, which arise out of existing circumstances, and are peculiarly worthy of our attention. That our enemies are Jehovah's sword, and that he is come forth against us as an avenger, cannot but be confessed: but whether it be for our chastisement only, or for our utter destruction, none can tell. One thing however is sure; that the best possible method of pacifying the divine anger, and averting the impending judgments, is, to flee unto the Saviour, and to seek mercy through him. If once we were stirred up, as a nation, to take refuge in him, He who spared repenting Nineveh, would spare us, and either avert the gathering storm, or deliver us from its dreadful ravages. This is the direction uniformly given us by God himself. Thus he says by the prophet Zephaniah, "Gather yourselves together, yea, gather together, O nation not desired; before the decree bring forth,

forth, before the day pass as the chaff, before the fierce anger of the Lord come upon you, before the day of the Lord's anger come upon you. Seek ye the Lord all ye meek of the earth, seek righteousness, seek meekness; it may be ye shall be hid in the day of the Lord's anger." Again he says by Isaiah, "Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee; hide thyself, as it were, for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast: for, behold, the Lord cometh out of his place to punish the inhabitants of the land for their iniquity." Could we but be prevailed upon to follow this advice, we doubt not but that it would be more effectual for our preservation than all the navies that can be built, or all the armies that can be mustered: for if God were for us, none could successfully fight against us. If we were even already vanquished, yea, and led into captivity, still we "should take those captive whose captives we were, and should rule over our oppressors." Let me not however be understood as disregarding the proper means of self-defence: for God saves by means; and to expect his interposition without using our utmost efforts in our own behalf, would be presumption.—Though therefore we would exhort all in the first place to flee for refuge to the hope set before them, we would also exhort them to stand forth manfully against the enemy; to regard neither time, nor labour, nor property, no, nor life itself, so that they may but help forward to the uttermost their country's cause. And though the occupation of a warrior is the last perhaps that a man of piety would choose, yet on the present occasion conscience requires, rather than forbids, that all of us should unite with heart and hand to repel the foe, and to sacrifice our lives, if need be, in defence of our religion and liberties, our property and friends, our king and country. Still however we must recur to our former observation; and urge in the first place the necessity of turning to our strong hold. Would to God that none of us might delay, or loiter, or slacken our pace, or yield to weariness, or regard any thing that we leave behind;

behind; but that all might flee, as Lot out of Sodom, to our adorable Saviour! Then, whether we live or die, we must be safe. The enemy may destroy our bodies, but our great adversary can never hurt our souls. Our immortal part will be placed beyond the reach of harm: and when empires fall, yea, and the whole earth shall be dissolved by fire, we shall dwell in mansions that are inaccessible to evil, and enjoy a bliss that shall never end.

## CXXXII.

### MOSES VIEWS CANAAN FROM PISGAH.

Deut. iii. 23—28. *And I besought the Lord at that time, saying, O Lord God, thou hast begun to shew thy servant thy greatness, and thy mighty hand: for what God is there in heaven or in earth that can do according to thy works, and according to thy might? I pray thee, let me go over, and see the good land that is beyond Jordan, that goodly mountain and Lebanon! But the Lord was wroth with me for your sakes, and would not hear me: and the Lord said unto me, Let it suffice thee; speak no more unto me of this matter. Get thee up into the top of Pisgah, and lift up thine eyes westward, and northward, and southward, and eastward, and behold it with thine eyes: for thou shalt not go over this Jordan. But charge Joshua, and encourage him, and strengthen him: for he shall go before this people, and he shall cause them to inherit the land which thou shalt see.*

THE character of Moses, in whatever point of view it be considered, is worthy of admiration: his zeal and industry, his patience and meekness, his fidelity and love, were never surpassed by any child of man. As an intercessor for the Lord's people, he stands unrivalled. Many were the occasions whereon he prevailed on God to spare that rebellious nation that had been committed to his charge. But behold, this eminent saint, who had so often succeeded in his applications for others, was now refused when praying for himself. And, though it might appear humiliating, and might lower him in the estimation of all future generations, he gives a faithful account of

of the whole matter, recording both the prayer that he offered, and the answer he received.

The points to which we would call your attention, are,

I. God's rejection of the prayer of Moses—

Nothing could be more proper than this prayer of Moses—

[He requested that he might be permitted to "go over Jordan, and see the promised land." It was with a view to the enjoyment of this land that he had laboured incessantly for forty years. He had held up the possession of it as the great inducement to the whole nation to come forth from Egypt, and to endure all the hardships of journeying in the wilderness, and the perils of protracted warfare against the inhabitants of the land. He knew that Canaan was "the glory of all lands." And now that the period for the full possession of it was arrived, yea, and God had given them an earnest of it in the subjugation of the kingdoms on the east of Jordan, who can wonder that Moses should be anxious to participate the promised happiness? *The manner in which he sought it* was most becoming. He did not complain of the sentence of exclusion that had been passed upon him; but only prayed that it might be reversed. Often had he urged similar petitions for others with success: and therefore he had reason to hope, that he might not plead in vain for himself. He did not certainly know that God's decree with respect to him differed from the threatenings that had been denounced against others: there might be a secret reserve of mercy in the one case as well as in the other: and therefore he was emboldened to offer his requests, but with a meekness and modesty peculiarly suited to the occasion.]

But God saw fit to reject his petition—

[The refusal which God gave him on this occasion was most peremptory. When he had rejected his prayer for the offending nation, he said, "Let me alone;" and in that very expression intimated the irresistible efficacy of prayer. But on this occasion he forbad him to "speak to him any more of that matter:" yea, he "*sware* to Moses, that he should not go over Jordan[a]." In this refusal there was an awful manifestation of the Divine displeasure. It was intended as a punishment both for his sin, and for the people's sin; for God was "wroth with him for *their* sakes," as well as for his own. To *him* the punishment was great, as being a painful privation, a heavy disappointment: to *them* also it was a severe rebuke, inasmuch as they were deprived of a loving father, a powerful intercessor, an experienced governor, and under whom they had succeeded hitherto beyond their most sanguine expectations.

We

[a] Deut. iv. 21.

We forbear to notice the *typical* intent of this dispensation, because we have mentioned it in a former part of this history[aa]: it is in a *practical* aspect only that we now consider it; and therefore we confine ourselves to such observations as arise from it in that view.]

This refusal however, though absolute, was not unmixed with kindness: as will appear from considering,

II. The mercy with which this judgment was tempered—

As God in later ages withheld from Paul, and even from his only dear Son, the blessings which they asked, but gave them what was more expedient under their circumstances[b], so now, whilst he denied to Moses an entrance into Canaan, he granted to him,

1. A sight of the whole land—

[He commanded Moses to go up on Mount Pisgah to view the land; and from that eminence he shewed him the whole extent of the country from east to west, and from north to south. The sight, we apprehend, was miraculous: because, however great the elevation of the mountain might be, we do not conceive that the places which he saw could be within the visible horizon[c]. However this might be, we have no doubt but that the sight must have been most gratifying to his mind, because it would be regarded as a pledge of God's fidelity, and a taste at least of those blessings, which Israel was about to enjoy in all their fulness.

But we are persuaded that Moses, notwithstanding he spoke so little about the heavenly world, knew the typical nature of the promised land, and beheld in Canaan a figurative representation of that better kingdom, to which he was about to be translated.]

2. An assurance that his place should be successfully filled by Joshua—

[To him was committed the office of instructing, encouraging, and strengthening Joshua for the arduous work which lay before him. And what could be a richer comfort to an aged Minister, than to see that God had already raised up one to occupy his post, and to carry on the work which he had begun? Methinks, the preparing of Joshua's mind for his high office was a task in which Moses would take peculiar delight: and the certainty

[aa] See Skel. on Numb. xx. 12.

[b] 2 Cor. xii. 8, 9. Luke xxii. 22, 23. with Heb. v. 7.

[c] Deut. xxxiv. 1—4.

certainty of Israel's ultimate success would cheer him under the pains of his own personal disappointment.]

The PRACTICAL OBSERVATIONS arising out of this history, will bring the subject home to our own business and bosoms. We learn from it,

1. To guard against sin—

[We might profitably dwell on this thought, if we considered only the exclusion of Moses from the promised land for one single transgression. But as other occasions must arise whereon such an observation may be grounded, we would call your attention rather to the injury which both Ministers and people may sustain by means of each other's transgressions. Repeatedly does Moses say, "God was wroth with me FOR YOUR SAKES:" from whence we are assured, that *their* sins were punished in *him*. And we know also that *his* sin was punished in *them*: they suffered no less by the loss of him, than he did by the loss of Canaan. Such a participation in each other's crimes and punishments is common in the world: children are affected by their parents' faults; and parents by the faults of their children. In the Ministerial relation, this happens as frequently as in any. If a Minister seek his own glory instead of God's, or be remiss in the duties of the closet, his people will suffer as well as he: the ordinances from whence they should derive nutriment will be to them "as dry breasts or a miscarrying womb." If, on the other hand, the people slight the Ministry of a faithful man, what wonder is it if God remove the candlestick from those who will not avail themselves of the light? If, on the other hand, they idolize their Minister, and put him, as it were, in the place of God, what wonder is it if God, who is a jealous God, leave him to fall, that they may see the folly of their idolatry; or take him from them, that they may learn where alone their dependence should be? Let the death of Moses, and the bereavement of the Israelites, be a warning to us all; that we provoke not God by our rebellions to withhold from us the blessings we desire, or to inflict upon us the punishments we deserve.]

2. To submit with humility to afflictive dispensations—

[When once Moses was informed of the decided purpose of God, he forbore to ask for any alteration of it; nor did he utter one murmuring or discontented word concerning it. God had bidden him to be satisfied with the mercies which he was about to receive; and he was satisfied with them. Now it may be that God has denied us many things which we could have wished to possess, or taken from us things which we have possessed. But if he have given us grace, and mercy, and peace through our Lord Jesus Christ, what reason can we have to complain?

plain? We have prayed to him perhaps under our trials, and they have not been removed; or we have deprecated them, and they have still been inflicted. But God has said to us, "Let it suffice thee" that I have made thee a partaker of my grace: "let it suffice thee" that I have given thee prospects of the promised land: "let it suffice thee" that thou hast a portion in a better world. And shall not these things be sufficient for us, though we be destitute of every thing else? Shall any of the concerns of time or sense be of much importance in our eyes, when we are so highly privileged, so greatly enriched? Ah! check the first risings of a murmuring thought, all ye who are ready to complain of your afflictions. Think whether you would exchange one Pisgah view of heaven for all that this earth can give: and, if you would not, then think, how richly heaven itself will compensate for all your light and momentary affiictions: and, instead of indulging any anxiety about the things of this world, let the prayer of David be the continual language both of your hearts and lips[d].]

3. To serve God with increasing activity to the end of life—

[The last month of Moses' continuance on earth was as fully occupied with the work of God as any month of his life. Though he knew that he must die within a few days, he did not intermit his labours in the least, but rather addressed himself to them with increasing energy and fidelity. This was the effect of very abundant grace: and it was an example but rarely copied. How many towards the close of life, when they know, not from revelation indeed but from their own feelings, that they must shortly die, become cold in their affections, slothful in their habits, querulous in their tempers, and remiss in their duties! Instead of taking occasion from the shortness of their time, to labour with increased diligence, how many yield to their infirmities, and make their weakness an excuse for wilful indolence! The Lord grant, that no such declensions may take place in any of us; but that rather "our last days may be our best days;" and that our Lord, finding us both watchful and active, may applaud us as good and faithful servants, prepared and fitted for his heavenly kingdom!]

[d] Ps. cvi. 4, 5.

## CXXXIII.

### MOSES' SOLEMN CHARGE TO ISRAEL.

Deut. iv. 7—9. *What nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the Lord our God is in all things that we call upon him for? And what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous, as all this law, which*

*which I set before you this day? Only take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen, and lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life; but teach them them thy sons, and thy sons' sons.*

PRACTICAL religion, however approved in theory, is not always admired when exhibited to our view. Not but that it has a beauty in it which commends itself to those who have a spiritual discernment; but it forms too strong a contrast with the ways of the world to gain its favour: the men of this world "love darkness rather than light;" and therefore agree to reprobate as visionary and gloomy, whatever opposes their evil habits. Nevertheless "the fear of the Lord, *that* is wisdom, and to depart from evil, *that* is understanding:" and, wherever any people are enabled to maintain an uniform and consistent conduct, there their very enemies must honour them in their hearts, and confess them to be "a wise and understanding people." This at least was the opinion of Moses, who from that very consideration urged the Jews to contemplate their high privileges, and to walk worthy of them[a]. To advance the same blessed end in you, we shall state,

I. The peculiar privileges of the Jewish nation—

They were certainly advanced above all the nations upon earth; as in other respects, so particularly,

1. In their nearness to God—

[Moses had enjoyed such access to God as no man had ever done before: and "conversed with him face to face, even as a man converseth with his friend[b]." That generation to whom he ministered, had seen on many occasions the efficacy of his intercession, and therefore could appreciate the force of that observation in the text, "What nation is there that hath God so nigh unto them, as the Lord our God is in all things that we call upon him for?" Nor was this privilege to be confined to Moses: the high priest was furnished with an ephod and a breast-plate, by means of which he was to inquire of God in every difficulty, and to obtain answers from him. This was used from time to time, even till the Jews were carried captive to Babylon: and the great privilege of having such means of communion with God

[a] ver. 5, 6. with the text. [b] Exod. xxxiii. 11.

God may be sufficiently seen in the advantage which David repeatedly derived from it, to learn the intentions of his enemies, and to gain direction respecting his own conduct[c]. The heathen indeed had their oracles, which they consulted; but from which they could derive no certain information. The ambiguity of the answers given by them, left room for opposite constructions, and proved that no dependence whatever could be placed upon them. Those oracles were a compound of lying priestcraft, and diabolic influence: and were no more to be compared with the oracle of God, than the light of a deceitful vapour with that of the meridian sun.]

2. In the excellence of the dispensation under which they lived—

[" The statutes and judgments" which Moses had delivered to them were altogether " righteous" and good. The *judicial* law, which was given for the regulation of their civil polity, was founded in perfect equity, and conducive in every point to the happiness of the community. The *moral* law was a transcript of the mind and will of God: it was in every respect " holy, and just, and good," and, if followed in every part, would assimilate the people to God himself. The *ceremonial* law also, notwithstanding it was burthensome in many respects, afforded peace and comfort to all who were bowed down with a sense of sin, and desirous of finding acceptance with an offended God. As for the heathen world, they had none of these advantages: they had no such light for the government of their states, no such instruction for the regulation of their conduct, no such consolations under the convictions of guilt or the dread of punishment. They had no better guide than their own weak unassisted reason: and though by means of that they were able to frame laws for the public good, they never could devise a system whereby the soul should be restored to holiness or peace. In these respects the Jews were elevated above all the world. The excellence and authority of their laws were undisputed; and every one was made happy by his observance of them.]

But still the Jews themselves had little to boast of in comparison of,

II. The superior privileges which we enjoy—

Our access to God is much nearer than theirs—

[They had, it is true, in some respects the advantage. No person now can hope for such special directions as were imparted by the Urim and Thummim. But it must be remembered that this mode of ascertaining the mind of God was of necessity confined to few: it was not possible for every person to go to the high priest, and to obtain his mediation with the Deity on every subject

[c] See 1 Sam. xxiii. 9—12. & xxx. 7, 8.

subject that might require light: this liberty could be used by few, and only on occasions of great public importance. But our access to the Deity is unlimited: every person, at all times, in every place, on every occasion, may come to God, without the intervention of a fellow-creature: in this respect every child of God is on a par with the high priest himself, or rather, is elevated to a state far above him, in proportion as a *spiritual* approach is nearer than that which is *bodily*, and an *immediate* access is nearer than that which is through the *medium* of an ephod and a breast-plate. Indeed the liberty given to us is unbounded: "In *every* thing we may make our requests known unto God;" and we may "ask what we will, and it shall be done unto us." Though therefore the Jews were privileged beyond the Gentiles, whose gods of wood and stone could not attend to their supplications, yet we are no less privileged above *them*, and can adopt a language unknown to them, "Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his son Jesus Christ."]

Our dispensation too is more excellent than theirs—

[We need not to disparage theirs in any respect, in order to raise in our estimation that under which we live. We may give to that all the honour it deserves, and yet not be afraid that ours will suffer any thing in the comparison. Theirs, excellent as it was, was only a shadow, of which ours is the substance. Whatever good theirs had, is retained and perfected in ours; whatever it had that was weak and burthensome, is done away. The peace which that afforded to the guilty conscience was slight and temporary: the very means of forgiveness were only so many fresh remembrances of unforgiven sin: but the peace obtained by us "passeth all understanding:" the joy we taste is "unspeakable and full of glory." The blood of bulls and of goats afforded a very weak ground for hope, in comparison of the blood of God's only-begotten Son: *that* "cleanseth from all sin," and "perfects for ever them that are sanctified." Again, the law of the ten commandments denounced a curse for one single violation of them, however small; and afforded no assistance to those who desired to fulfil it: but the precepts of the Gospel, though as holy and as perfect as the Law itself, are accompanied with promises of grace and offers of mercy to all who endeavour to obey them: God undertakes to write them on our hearts, so as to make a compliance with them both easy and delightful. In a word, their law was a yoke of bondage, productive only of slavish fears, and ineffectual efforts: whereas our law, the law of faith, begets a filial spirit, and transforms "into the image of our God in righteousness and true holiness." Compare the two dispensations, and we shall see in a moment our superior advantages: for whilst they were only slaves under the lash, we have the happiness of being "sons and heirs."]

If

If such be our distinguished privileges, it becomes us to consider,

III. Our duty in reference to them—

This was a point which Moses was extremely anxious to impress on the minds of every individual; "*Only* take heed to *thyself*, and keep thy soul diligently." In like manner would we urge you in relation to the privileges you enjoy,

1. To keep up the remembrance of them in your own hearts—

[It is scarcely necessary to observe, how apt we are to forget the mercies which God has vouchsafed unto us. The mere facts indeed may easily be retained in our heads; but a due sense of the kindness expressed in them, and of the obligations conferred by them, is not easily preserved upon the soul. The smallest trifle is sufficient to draw us from heavenly contemplations, and to engage those affections, which should be exclusively fixed on God. Hence Moses bade the people "take heed, lest the things which they had seen should depart from their *heart*[d]." What then must we do? We must avoid the things which would weaken our sense of God's mercies to us; and abound in those exercises which will keep alive the sense of them upon our hearts. Worldly cares, worldly pleasures, worldly company, should all be regarded by us with a godly fear and jealousy, lest they "choke the seed" which is springing up in our hearts, and prevent us from "bringing forth fruit unto perfection." On the other hand, our meditation on the Christian's privileges should be frequent: we should muse on them, till the fire kindle in our hearts, and we are constrained to speak of them with our tongues. It is thus that we must trim the lamps of our sanctuary; it is thus that we must be keeping up the fire on the altar of our hearts. In a word, if we will improve our privileges, we shall have them augmented and confirmed: if, on the other hand, we slumber over them, we shall give advantage to our enemy to despoil us of them[e].]

2. To transmit the memory of them to posterity—

[The Jews were made depositaries of divine knowledge for the good of the Christian Church: and it is in the same light that we are to consider the Scriptures which are committed to us; they are not for our personal benefit merely, but for the use of the Church in all future ages. Hence then we are bound to "teach them to our sons, and our sons' sons." It is greatly to be lamented indeed that so little attention is paid to the Sacred Oracles in the public seminaries of learning. Something of a form

[d] See also Heb. ii. 1. [e] Matt. xiii. 12.

form indeed may be observed; a form, from which the very persons who enforce it neither expect nor desire any practical effect: but if one half the pains were taken to make us understand and feel the exalted privileges of Christianity, as are bestowed on elucidating the beauties of Classic Writers, or exploring the depths of science and philosophy, we should see religion and morals in a very different state amongst us. It was for the instructing of their children in righteousness that the awful transactions that took place at Mount Horeb were required to be more particularly impressed on all succeeding generations[f]: and if the law from Mount Sinaï was to be so carefully communicated to the children of Jews, ought not "the law that came forth from Mount Zion[g]," even "the law of faith," to be proclaimed to our children? If *they* were to remember Horeb, shall not *we* remember Bethlehem, where the Son of God was born into the world; and Calvary, where he shed his blood; and Olivet, from whence he ascended up to heaven, and led captive all the powers of darkness? Yes surely, these great transactions should be dwelt upon, not as mere historical facts, but as truths whereon are founded all the hopes and expectations of sinful man: and we cannot but regard it as a blessing to the Christian world, that days are set apart for the special remembrance of those great events; that so not one of them may be overlooked, but that all in succession may be presented to the view of every Christian in the land. Let us then habituate ourselves to dwell upon them as the most delightful of all subjects[h], and "account both our time and money well spent in promoting the knowledge of them in the world."]

[f] ver. 10. [g] Isai. ii. 3. [h] Deut. xi. 18—20.

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## CXXXIV.

### EXCELLENCY OF THE LITURGY.*

Deut. v. 28, 29. *They have well said all that they have spoken: O that there were such an heart in them!*

THE historical parts of the Old Testament are more worthy of our attention than men generally imagine. A multitude of facts recorded in them are replete with spiritual instruction, being intended by God to serve as emblems of those deep mysteries which were afterwards to be revealed. For instance: What is related of our first parent, his creation, his marriage, his sabbatic rest, was emblematic of that new

* This and the following Sermons on the same subject were preached before the University of Cambridge.

new creation which God will produce in us, and of that union with Christ whereby it shall be effected, and of the glorious rest to which it shall introduce us, as well in this world as in the world to come. In like manner the promises made to Adam, to Abraham, and to David, whatever reference they might have to the particular circumstances of those illustrious individuals, had a farther and more important accomplishment in the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the second Adam, the Promised Seed, the King of Israel.

The whole of the Mosaic dispensation was altogether figurative, as we see from the Epistle to the Hebrews, in which the figures themselves are illustrated and explained. But there are some facts which appear too trifling to afford any instruction of this kind. We might expect indeed that so remarkable a fact as the promulgation of the Law from Mount Sinaï should have in it something mysterious; but that the fears of the people on that occasion; and the request dictated by those fears, should be intended by God to convey any particular instruction, we should not have readily supposed: yet by these did God intend to shadow forth the whole mystery of Redemption. We are sure that there was somewhat remarkable in the people's speech, by the commendation which God himself bestowed upon it: still however, unless we have turned our minds particularly to the subject, we shall scarcely conceive how much is contained in it.

The point for our consideration is, *The request which the Israelites made in consequence of the terror with which the display of the Divine Majesty had inspired them.* The explication and improvement of that point is all that properly belongs to the passage before us. But we have a further view in taking this text: we propose, after considering it in its true and proper sense, to take it in an improper and accommodated sense; and, after making some observations upon it *in reference to the request which the Israelites then offered,* to notice it *in reference to the requests which we from time*

*to*

*to time make unto God in the Liturgy of our Established Church.*

The former view of the text is that which we propose for our present consideration: the latter will be reserved for future discussion.

The Israelites made an earnest request to God: and God expressed his approbation of it in the words which we have just recited; "They have well said all that they have spoken: O that there were such an heart in them!" From hence we are naturally led to set before you The *sentiments* and *dispositions* which God approves;—the *sentiments;* "They have well said all that they have spoken;"—the *dispositions;* "O that there were in them such an heart!"

1st. The sentiments which he approves.

Here it will be necessary to analyse, as it were, or at least to get a clear and distinct apprehension of, the speech which God commends. It is recorded in the preceding context from the 23d verse. "And it came to pass, when ye heard the voice out of the midst of the darkness, (for the mountain did burn with fire,) that ye came near unto me, even all the heads of your tribes, and your elders; and ye said, Behold, the Lord our God hath shewed us his glory, and his greatness, and we have heard his voice out of the midst of the fire: we have seen this day, that God doth talk with man, and he liveth. Now therefore why should we die? for this great fire will consume us: if we hear the voice of the Lord our God any more, then we shall die. For who is there of all flesh that hath heard the voice of the living God, speaking out of the midst of the fire, as we have, and lived? Go thou near, and hear all that the Lord our God shall say; and speak thou unto us all that the Lord our God shall speak unto thee, and we will hear it, and do it." Then it is added, "And the Lord heard the voice of your words, when ye spake unto me; and the Lord said unto me, I have heard the voice of the words of this people, which they have spoken unto thee: they have well said all that they have spoken."

Now

Now in this speech are contained the following things; An acknowledgment that they could not stand before the Divine Majesty;—A desire that God would appoint some one to mediate between him and them;—and lastly, An engagement to regard every word that should be delivered to them through a Mediator, with the same obediential reverence, as they would if it were spoken to them by God himself. And these are the sentiments, on which the commendation in our text was unreservedly bestowed.

The first thing then to be noticed is, *Their acknowledgment that they could not stand before the Divine Majesty.*

Many things had now occurred to produce an extraordinary degree of terror upon their minds. There was a blackness and darkness in the sky, such as they never before beheld. This darkness was rendered more visible by the whole adjacent mountain blazing with fire, and by vivid lightnings flashing all around in quick succession. The roaring peals of thunder added an awful solemnity to the scene. The trumpet sounding with a long and increasingly tremendous blast, accompanied as it was by the mountain shaking to its centre, appalled the trembling multitude: and Jehovah's voice, uttering with inconceivable majesty his authoritative commands, caused even Moses himself to say, I exceedingly fear and quake[a]. In consequence of this terrific scene, we are told that the people "removed and stood afar off[b]," lest the fire should consume them, or the voice of God strike them dead upon the spot[c]. Now though this was in them a mere slavish fear, and the request founded upon it had respect only to their temporal safety, yet the sentiment itself was good, and worthy of universal adoption. God being hidden from our senses, so that we neither see nor hear him, we are ready to think lightly of him, and even to rush into his more immediate presence without any

[a] Compare Exod. xix. 16—19. with Heb. xii. 18—21.
[b] Exod. xx. 18, 19. [c] ver. 21, above cited.

any holy awe upon our minds: but when he speaks to us in thunder or by an earthquake, the most hardened rebel is made to feel that "with God is terrible majesty," and that "he is to be had in reverence by all that are round about him." This is a lesson which God has abundantly taught us by his dealings with the Jews. Among the men of Bethshemesh, a great multitude were slain for their irreverent curiosity in looking into the ark; as Uzzah also afterwards was for his well-meant but erroneous zeal in presuming to touch it. The reason of such acts of severity is told us in the history of Nadab and Abihu, who were struck dead for offering strange fire on the altar of their God: they are designed to teach us, "that God will be sanctified in all that come nigh unto him, and before all the people he will be glorified[d]."

The next thing to be noticed is, *Their desire to have some person appointed who should act as a Mediator between God and them.* They probably had respect only to the present occasion: but God interpreted their words as general, and as importing a request that he would send them a permanent Mediator, who should transact all their business, as it were, with God, making known to him their wants, and communicating from him the knowledge of his will. That God did construe their words in this extended sense, we are informed by Moses in a subsequent chapter of this book. In 18th of Deut. and 15th and following verses, this explanation of the matter is given: "The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him shall ye hearken, *according to all that thou desiredst of the Lord thy God in Horeb, in the day of the assembly, saying, Let me not hear again the voice of the Lord my God, neither let me see this great fire any more, that I die not. And the Lord said unto me, They have well spoken that which they have spoken.* I WILL RAISE THEM UP A PROPHET FROM AMONG

[d] Lev. x. 1—3.

AMONG THEIR BRETHREN,[e] like unto thee, and will put my words in HIS mouth; and HE shall speak unto them all that I command him: and it shall come to pass, that whosoever will not hearken unto my words which HE shall speak in my name, I will require it of him." Who *this* Prophet was, we are at no loss to declare: for the apostle Peter, endeavouring to convince the Jews from their own Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ, and that Moses himself had required them to believe in him, *cites these very words as referring to Christ,* and calls upon them to regard him as that very Mediator, whom God had sent in answer to the petitions which had been offered by their forefathers at Mount Horeb[e].

Here it should be remembered that we are speaking, not from conjecture, but from infallible authority; and that the construction we are putting on the text is, not a fanciful interpretation of our own, but God's own exposition of his own words.

Behold then the sentiment expressed in our text, and the commendation given to it by God himself: it is a sentiment, which is the very sum and substance of the whole Gospel: it is a sentiment, which whosoever embraces truly, and acts upon it faithfully, can never perish, but shall have eternal life. The preceding sentiment, that we are incapable of standing before an holy God, is good, as introductory to this; but *this* is the crown of all: this consciousness that we *cannot* come to God, and that God *will not* come to us, but through CHRIST. This acquiescence in HIM as the divinely appointed Mediator; this acceptance of him as "the Way, the Truth, and the Life;" *this sentiment,* I say, God did, and will, approve, wheresoever it may be found. The Lord grant that we may all embrace this sentiment as we ought; and that, having tasted its sweetness and felt its efficacy, we may attain by means of it all the blessings which a due reception of it will insure!

The third thing to be noticed is, *Their engagement to yield unqualified obedience to every thing that should be*

[e] Acts iii. 22, 23.

*be spoken to them by the Mediator.* This, if viewed only as a general promise of obedience, was good, and highly acceptable to God; since the obedience of his creatures is the very end of all his dispensations towards them. It is, to bring them to obedience, that he alarms them by the denunciations of his wrath, and encourages them by the promises of his Gospel: when once they are brought to love his law, and obey his commandments, all the designs of his love and mercy are accomplished; and nothing remains but that they attain that measure of sanctification, that shall fit them for the glory which he has prepared for them.

But there is far more in this part of our subject than appears at first sight. We will endeavour to enter into it somewhat more minutely, in order to explain what we conceive to be contained in it.

The moral law was never given with a view to men's obtaining salvation by their obedience to it; for it was not possible that they who had transgressed it in any one particular, should afterwards be justified by it. St. Paul says, "If there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law[f]." But the law could not give life to fallen man: and therefore that way of obtaining righteousness is for ever closed. With what view then was the law given? I answer, to shew the existence of sin, and the lost state of man by reason of sin, and to shut him up to that way of obtaining mercy, which God has revealed in his Gospel. I need not multiply passages in proof of this; two will suffice to establish it beyond a doubt: "As many as are under the law, are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them." Again, "The law is our schoolmaster, to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith[g]." But when the law has answered this end, then it has a further use, namely, to make known to us the way in which we should walk.

[f] Gal. iii. 21. [g] Gal. iii. 10. & 24.

walk. In the first instance we are to flee from it *as a Covenant*, and to seek for mercy through the Mediator: but when we have obtained mercy through the Mediator, then we are to receive the law at his hands *as a rule of life*, and to render a willing obedience to it.

Now all this was shadowed forth in the history before us. God gave Israel his law immediately from his own mouth: and, so given, it terrified them beyond measure, and caused them to desire a Mediator. At the same time they did not express any wish to be liberated from obedience to it: on the contrary, they engaged, that, whatever God should speak to them by the Mediator, they would listen to it readily, and obey it unreservedly. This was right; and God both approved of it in them, and will approve of it in every child of man.

We are afraid of perplexing the subject, if we dwell any longer on this branch of it; because it would divert your attention from the main body of the Discourse: we will therefore content ourselves with citing one passage, wherein the whole is set forth in the precise point of view in which we have endeavoured to place it. We have shewn that the transactions at Mount Sinaï were intended to shadow forth the nature of the two dispensations (that of the Law and that of the Gospel) in a contrasted view; that the terrific nature of the one made the Israelites desirous to obtain an interest in the other; and that the appointment of Moses to be their Mediator, and to communicate to them the further knowledge of his will with a view to their future obedience, was altogether illustrative of the Gospel; which, whilst it teaches us to flee to Christ from the curses of the broken law, requires us afterwards to obey that law: in a word, we have shewn, that though, as St. Paul expresses it, we are "without law," (considered as a Covenant,) we are nevertheless "not without law to God, but under the law to Christ[h]:" and all this is set forth in the 12th chapter of the Epistle

[h] 1 Cor. ix. 21.

Epistle to the Hebrews, in the following words: "Ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest, and the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words; which voice they that heard, intreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more: (for they could not endure that which was commanded: and so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake:) but ye are come unto Mount Sion, and unto the city of the Living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general Assembly and Church of the first-born, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and *to Jesus the Mediator of the New Covenant*, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel[i]."

I would only observe, in order to prevent any misconception of my meaning, that I do not suppose the Israelites to have had a distinct view of these things, such as we have at present; but that they spake like Caiaphas the high priest, when he said, "It was expedient for one man to die for the people, rather than that the whole nation should perish[k]:" they did not understand the full import of their own words; but God overruled their present feelings so that they spake what was proper to shadow forth the mysteries of his Gospel; and he then interpreted their words according to the full and comprehensive sense in which he intended they should be understood.

We could gladly have added somewhat more in confirmation of the sentiments which have been set before you, and particularly as founded on the passage we are considering; but your time forbids it; and therefore we pass on to notice, in the

IId place, The *dispositions* which God approves. These must be noticed with a direct reference to the *sentiments* already considered: for God, having said, "They

[i] Heb. xii. 18—24. [k] John xi. 49—52.

"They have well said all that they have spoken," adds, "O that there were such an heart in them!"

It is but too common for those desires which arise in the mind under some peculiarly alarming circumstances, to prove only transient, and to yield in a very little time to the rooted inclination of the heart. This, it is to be feared, was the case with Israel at that time: and God himself intimated, that the seed which thus hastily sprang up, would soon perish for want of a sufficient root. But the information which we derive from hence is wholly independent of them: whether they cultivated these dispositions or not, we see what dispositions God approves. It is his wish to find in all of us, *A reverential fear of God—A love to Jesus as our Mediator*—and *An unfeigned delight in his commands.*

First he desires to find in us *A reverential fear of God.* That ease, that indifference, that security, which men in general indulge, is most displeasing to him. Behold, how he addresses men of this description by the prophet Jeremiah: "Hear now this, O foolish people, and without understanding; which have eyes and see not; which have ears and hear not: Fear ye not me? saith the Lord: will ye not tremble at my presence, which have placed the sand for the bound of the sea, by a perpetual decree, that it cannot pass it; and though the waves thereof toss themselves, yet can they not prevail; though they roar, yet can they not pass over it? But this people hath a revolting and a rebellious heart; they are revolted and gone: neither say they in their heart, Let us now fear the Lord our God[l]." Hear too what he says by the prophet Zephaniah: "I will search Jerusalem with candles, and will punish the men that are settled on their lees[m]." It is thought by many, that, if they commit no flagrant enormity, they have no cause to fear: but even a heathen, when brought to a right mind, saw the folly and impiety of such a conceit, and issued a decree to all the subjects of his realm, that they should all "tremble and fear before the God of Daniel, who is the Living God,

[l] Jer. v. 21—24. [m] Zeph. i. 12.

God, and stedfast for ever[n]." Such a state of mind is dreaded, from an idea that it must of necessity be destructive of all happiness. This however is not true: on the contrary, the more of holy fear we have in our hearts, the happier we shall be. If indeed our fear be only of a slavish kind, it will make us unhappy; but, in proportion as it partakes of filial regard, and has respect to God as a Father, it will become a source of unspeakable peace and joy. The testimony of Solomon is, "Happy is the man that feareth alway[o]." Nor should we shun even the slavish fear, since it is generally the prelude to that which is truly filial; the spirit of bondage is intended to lead us to a spirit of adoption, whereby we may cry, Abba, Father[p]. Another ground on which men endeavour to put away the fear of God is, that it argues weakness of understanding and meanness of spirit; but we are told on infallible authority, that "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: a good understanding have all they that do his commandments: his praise endureth for ever[q]." Permit me then to recommend to you this holy disposition. Learn to "fear that glorious and fearful name, THE LORD THY GOD[r]." Stand in awe of his Divine Majesty: and dread his displeasure more than death itself. Bethink yourselves, How you shall appear before him in the day of judgment. Settle it in your minds, whether you will think as lightly of him when you are standing at his tribunal, with all his terrible Majesty displayed before your eyes, as you are wont to do now that he is hid from your sight. Examine carefully whether you are prepared to meet him, and to receive your final doom at his hands. I well know, that such thoughts are not welcome to the carnal mind: but I know also that they are salutary, yea, and indispensably necessary too for every child of man. I would therefore adopt the language of the Angel, who flew in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting Gospel to preach to them that dwell on the

[n] Dan. vi. 26. [o] Prov. xxviii. 14. [p] Rom. viii. 15.
[q] Ps. cxi. 10. [r] Deut. xxviii. 58.

the earth, even to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people; and like him I would say with a loud voice, "Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come[s]:" it is come already in the Divine purpose; and it will speedily come to every individual amongst us, and will fix us in an eternity of bliss or woe.

The next disposition which God would have us cultivate, is, *A love to Jesus as our Mediator.* In proportion as we fear God, we shall love the Lord Jesus Christ, who has condescended to mediate between God and us. Were it only that he, like Moses, had revealed to us the will of God in a less terrific way, we ought to love him: but he has done infinitely more for us than Moses could possibly do; he has not only stood between God and us, but has placed himself in our stead, and borne the wrath of God for us. He has not only silenced the thunders of Mount Sinai, but "has redeemed us from the curse of the law, being himself made a curse for us[t]." In a word, "He has made reconciliation for us by the blood of his cross;" so that we may now come to God as our Father and our Friend; and may expect at his hands all the blessings of grace and glory. "Through him we have access to God," even to his throne; and by faith in him we may even now receive the remission of our sins, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. Shall we not then love him? Shall we not honour him? Shall we not employ him in his high office as our Advocate and Mediator? Shall we not glory in him, and "cleave unto him with full purpose of heart?" It was said by the prophet Isaiah, "Surely, shall one say, In the Lord have I righteousness and strength: even to him shall men come; and all that are incensed against him shall be ashamed. In the Lord shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory[u]." O that this prophecy may be fulfilled in us; and that there may henceforth "be in every individual amongst us such an heart!"

Lastly,

[s] Rev. xiv. 6, 7. [t] Gal. iii. 13. [u] Isai. xlv. 24, 25.

Lastly, God would behold in us *An unfeigned delight in his commandments.* This *will be* the fruit, and *must be* the evidence, of our love to Christ: "If ye love me," says our Lord, "keep my commandments[x]:" and again, "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me[y]." Indeed without this, ALL our sentiments or professions are of no avail: "Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping of the commandments of God[z]."

When persons hear of our being "delivered from the law," and "dead to the law," they feel a jealousy upon the subject of morality, and begin to fear that we open to men the flood-gates of licentiousness: but their fears are both unnecessary and unscriptural; for the very circumstance of our being delivered from the law as a covenant of works, is that which most forcibly constrains us to take it as a rule of life. Hear how St. Paul speaks on this subject: "I, through the law, am dead to the law, *that I might live unto God*[a]:" and again, "My brethren, ye are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, *that we should bring forth fruit unto God*[b]." You perceive then that the liberty to which we are brought by Jesus Christ, has the most friendly aspect imaginable upon the practice of good works, yea, rather, that it absolutely secures the performance of them. Whilst therefore we would urge with all possible earnestness a simple affiance in Christ as your Mediator, we would also intreat you to receive the commandments at his hands, and to observe them with your whole hearts. Take our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, for instance: study with care and diligence the full import of every precept in it. Do not endeavour to bring down those precepts to your practice, or to the practice of the world around you; but rather strive to elevate your practice

[x] John xiv. 15.
[y] John xiv. 21.
[z] 1 Cor. vii. 19.
[a] Gal. ii. 19.
[b] Rom. vii. 4.

practice to the standard which he has given you. In like manner, take all the precepts contained in the Epistles, and all the holy dispositions which were exercised by the Apostles; and endeavour to emulate the examples of the most distinguished Saints. You are cautioned not to be *righteous over-much*; but remember, that you have at least equal need of caution to be *righteous enough*. If only you walk in the steps of our Lord and his Apostles, you need not be afraid of excess: it is an *erroneous kind* of righteousness, against which Solomon would guard you, and not against an *excessive degree* of true holiness; for in true holiness there can be no excess. In this we may vie with each other, and strive with all our might. St. Paul says, "This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they who have believed in God might be careful to maintain (or, as the word imports, to excel in) good works." By these we shall evince the sincerity of our love to Christ; and by these we shall be judged in the last day. I would therefore recommend to every one to ask himself, What is there which I have left undone? What is there which I have done defectively? What is there which I have done amiss? What is there that I may do more earnestly for the honour of God, for the good of mankind, and for the benefit of my own soul? O that such a pious zeal pervaded this whole assembly; and "that there were in all of us such an heart!" To those amongst us in whom any good measure of this grace is found, we would say in the language of St. Paul, "We beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and *to please God*, so ye would abound more and more[c]."

[c] 1 Thess. iv. 1.

## CXXXV.

### EXCELLENCY OF THE LITURGY.

Deut. v. 28, 29. *They have well said all that they have spoken: O that there were such an heart in them!*

WHEREVER the word of God admits of a literal interpretation, its primary sense ought to be clearly stated, before any spiritual or mystical application be made of it: but when its literal meaning is ascertained, we must proceed to investigate its hidden import, which is frequently the more important. This has been done in relation to the passage before us; which primarily expresses an approbation of the request made by the Jews, that God would speak to them by the mediation of Moses, and not any longer by the terrific thunders of Mount Sinaï; but covertly it conveyed an intimation, that we should all seek deliverance from the curse of the Law through the mediation of that great Prophet, whom God raised up like unto Moses, even his Son Jesus Christ.

The further use which we propose to make of this passage, is only in a way of accommodation; which however is abundantly sanctioned by the example of the Apostles; who not unfrequently adopt the language of the Old Testament to convey their own ideas, even when it has no necessary connexion with their subject. Of course, the Liturgy of our Church was never in the contemplation of the Sacred Historian: yet, as in that we constantly address ourselves to God, and as it is a composition of unrivalled excellence, and needs only the exercise of our devout affections to render it a most acceptable service before God, we may well apply to it the commendation in our text; "They have well said all that they have spoken: O that there were such an heart in them!"

As in the course of the month two other occasions of prosecuting our subject will occur, we shall arrange our observations on the Liturgy, so as to vindicate

vindicate its use—display its excellence—and commend to your attention one particular part, which we conceive to be eminently deserving notice in this place.

In the present Discourse we shall confine ourselves to the vindication of the Liturgy; first, Generally, as a service proper to be used; and then Particularly, in reference to some objections which are urged against it.

Perhaps there never was any human composition more cavilled at, or less deserving such treatment, than our Liturgy. Nothing has been deemed too harsh to say of it. In order therefore to a *general vindication* of it, we propose to shew, that the use of it is *lawful in itself—expedient for us—and acceptable to God.*

*It is lawful in itself.*

The use of a form of prayer cannot be in itself wrong; for, if it had been, God would not have prescribed the use of forms to the Jewish nation. But God did prescribe them on several occasions. The words which the priest was to utter in blessing the people of Israel, are thus specified: "Speak unto Aaron, and unto his sons, saying, On this wise ye shall bless the children of Israel, saying unto them, The Lord bless thee, and keep thee: the Lord make his face to shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: the Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace[a]." In like manner, when a man that had been slain was found, inquisition was to be made for his blood; and the elders of the city that was nearest to the body, were to make a solemn affirmation before God, that they knew not who the murderer was, and at the same time *in a set form of prayer* to deprecate the Divine displeasure[b]. At the offering of the first-fruits, both at the beginning and end of the service, there were forms of very considerable length, which every offerer was to utter before the Lord[c].

When David brought up the ark from the house of Obed-edom

[a] Numb. vi. 23—26. [b] Deut. xxi. 7, 8.
[c] Deut. xxvi. 3, 5—10, 13—15.

Obed-edom to the tent which he had pitched for it in Jerusalem, he composed a form of prayer and thanksgiving for the occasion, selected out of four different Psalms[d], and put it into the hand of Asaph and his brethren for the use of the whole congregation. In all following ages, the Psalms were used as forms of devotion: Hezekiah appointed them for that purpose when he restored the worship of God, which had been suspended and superseded in the days of Ahaz[e]; as did Ezra also at the laying of the foundation of the second temple[f]. Nay, the Hymn which our blessed Lord sang with his Disciples immediately after he had instituted his Supper as the memorial of his death[g], was either taken from the Psalms, from 113th to 118th inclusive, or else was a particular form composed for that occasion. All this sufficiently shews that forms of devotion are not evil in themselves.

But some think, that though they were not evil under the Jewish dispensation, which consisted altogether of rites and carnal ordinances, they are evil under the more spiritual dispensation of the Gospel. This however cannot be; because our blessed Lord taught his Disciples a form of prayer, and not only told them to pray *after that manner*, as one Evangelist mentions, but to *use the very words*, as another Evangelist declares. Indeed the word οὕτως, by which St. Matthew expresses it, is not *of necessity* to be confined to manner[h]; it *might* be taken as referring to the very words: but, granting that he speaks of the manner only, and prescribes it as a model; yet St. Luke certainly requires us to use it as a form: "Jesus said unto them, *When ye pray, say*, Our Father which art in heaven[i]." Accordingly we find, from the testimonies of some of the earliest and most eminent Fathers of the Church[k], that it was constantly

[d] Compare 1 Chron. xvi. 7—36. with Ps. cv. 1—15. and xcvi. 1—13. and cxxxvi. 1. and cvi. 47, 48.
[e] 2 Chron. xxix. 30. [f] Ezra iii. 10, 11. [g] Matt. xxvi. 30.
[h] Matt. vi. 9. [i] Luke xi. 2.
[k] Tertullian—Cyprian—Cyril—Jerom—Augustine—Chrysostom—Gregory. See Bennet's *London Cases*, p. 52.

stantly regarded and used in the Church as a form from the very times of the Apostles. As for the objection, that we do not read in the New Testament that it was so used, it is of no weight at all; for we are not told that the Apostles ever baptized persons in the Name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; but can we therefore doubt whether they did use this form of baptism? Assuredly not; and therefore the circumstance of such an use of the Lord's Prayer not being recorded, especially in so short a history as that of the Apostles, is no argument at all that it was not so used.

Nor was this the only form used in the Apostolic age. Lucian, speaking of the first Christians, says, "They spend whole nights in singing of Psalms:" and Pliny, in his famous Letter to Trajan, which was written not much above ten years after the death of John the Evangelist, says of them, "It is their manner to sing by turns a hymn to Christ as God." This latter, it should seem, was not a Psalm of David, but a hymn composed for the purpose: and it proves indisputably, that even in the Apostolic age, forms of devotion were in use. If we come down to the times subsequent to the Apostles, we shall find Liturgies composed for the service of the different Churches. The Liturgies of St. Peter, St. Mark, and St. James, though they were corrupted in later ages, are certainly of high antiquity: that of St. James was of great authority in the Church, in the days of Cyril, who in his younger years, at the end of the third or beginning of the fourth century, wrote a Comment upon it. And it were easy to trace the use of them from that time even to the present day. Shall it be said, then, that the use of a pre-composed form of prayer is not lawful? Would God have given so many forms under the Jewish dispensation, and would our blessed Lord have given a form for the use of his Church and people, if it had not been lawful to use a form? But it is worthy of observation, that those who most loudly decry the use of forms, do themselves use forms, whenever they unite

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in public worship. What are hymns, but forms of prayer and praise? and if it be lawful to worship God in forms of verse, is it not equally so in forms of prose? We may say therefore, our adversaries themselves being judges, that the use of a form of prayer is lawful.

As for those passages of Scripture which are supposed to hold forth an expectation that under the Gospel we should have ability to pray without a form; for instance, that "God would give us a spirit of grace and of supplication," and that "the Spirit should help our infirmities, and teach us what to pray for as we ought;" they do not warrant us to expect, that we shall be enabled to speak by inspiration, as the Apostles did, but that our hearts should be disposed for prayer, and be enabled to enjoy near and intimate communion with God in that holy exercise: but they may be fulfilled to us as much in the use of a pre-composed form, as in any extemporaneous effusions of our own: and it is certain, that persons may be very fluent in the expressions of prayer without the smallest spiritual influence upon their minds; and that they may, on the other hand, be very fervent in prayer, though the expressions be already provided to their hand: and consequently, the promised assistance of the Spirit is perfectly consistent with the use of prayers that have been pre-composed.

But the lawfulness of forms of prayer is in this day pretty generally conceded. Many however still question their expediency. We proceed therefore to shew next, that the use of the Liturgy is *expedient for us*.

Here let it not be supposed that I am about to condemn those who differ from us in judgment or in practice. The Legislature has liberally conceded to all the subjects of the realm a right of choice; and God forbid that any one should wish to abridge them of it, in a matter of such high concern as the worship of Almighty God. If any think themselves more edified by extempore prayer, we rejoice that their souls

souls are benefited, though it be not precisely in our way: but still we cannot be insensible to the advantages which we enjoy; and much less can we concede, to any, that the use of a prescribed form of prayer is the smallest disadvantage.

We say, then, that the Liturgy was of great use *at the time it was made.* At the commencement of the Reformation, the most lamentable ignorance prevailed throughout the land: and even those who from their office ought to have been well instructed in the holy Scriptures, themselves needed to be taught what were the first principles of the oracles of God. If then the pious and venerable Reformers of our Church had not provided a suitable form of prayer, the people would still in many thousands of parishes have remained in utter darkness; but by the diffusion of this sacred light throughout the land, every part of the kingdom became in a good measure irradiated with Scriptural knowledge, and with saving truth. The few who were enlightened, might indeed have scattered some partial rays around them; but their light would have been only as a meteor, that passes away and leaves no permanent effect. Moreover, if their zeal and knowledge and piety had been suffered to die with them, we should have in vain sought for compositions of equal excellence from any set of governors, from that day to the present hour: but by conveying to posterity the impress of their own piety in stated forms of prayer, they have in them transmitted a measure of their own spirit, which, like Elijah's mantle, has descended on multitudes who have succeeded them in their high office. It is not possible to form a correct estimate of the benefit which we at this day derive from having such a standard of piety in our hands: but we do not speak too strongly if we say, that the most enlightened amongst us, of whatever denomination they may be, owe much to the existence of our Liturgy; which has been, as it were, the pillar and ground of the Truth in this kingdom, and has served as fuel to perpetuate the flame, which the

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Lord himself, at the time of the Reformation, kindled upon our altars.

But we must go further, and say, that the use of the Liturgy is *equally expedient still.* Of course, we must not be understood as speaking of private prayer in the closet; where, though a young and inexperienced person may get help from written forms, it is desirable that every one should learn to express his own wants in his own language; because no written prayer can enter so minutely into his wants and feelings as he himself may do: but, in public, we maintain, that the use of such a form as ours is still as expedient as ever. To lead the devotions of a congregation in extempore prayer is a work for which but few are qualified. An extensive knowledge of the Scriptures must be combined with fervent piety, in order to fit a person for such an undertaking: and I greatly mistake, if there be found an humble person in the world, who, after engaging often in that arduous work, does not wish at times that he had a suitable form prepared for him. That the constant repetition of the same form does not so forcibly arrest the attention as new sentiments and expressions would do, must be confessed: but, on the other hand, the use of a well-composed form secures us against the dry, dull, tedious repetitions which are but too frequently the fruits of extemporaneous devotions. Only let any person be in a devout frame, and he will be far more likely to have his soul elevated to heaven by the Liturgy of the Established Church, than he will by the generality of prayers which he would hear in other places of worship: and, if any one complain that he cannot enter into the spirit of them, let him only examine his frame of mind when engaged in extemporaneous prayers, whether in public, or in his own family; and he will find, that his formality is not confined to the service of the Church, but is the sad fruit and consequence of his own weakness and corruption.

Here it may not be amiss to rectify the notions which are frequently entertained of spiritual edification.

cation. Many, if their imaginations are pleased, and their spirits elevated, are ready to think, that they have been greatly edified: and this error is at the root of that preference which they give to extempore prayer, and the indifference which they manifest towards the prayers of the Established Church. But real edification consists in humility of mind, and in being led to a more holy and consistent walk with God: and one atom of such a spirit is more valuable than all the animal fervour that ever was excited. It is with *solid truths*, and not with *fluent words*, that we are to be impressed: and if we can desire from our hearts the things which we pray for in our public forms, we need never regret, that our fancy was not gratified, or our animal spirits raised, by the delusive charms of novelty.

In what we have spoken on this subject, it must be remembered that we have spoken only in a way of vindication: the true, the exalted, and the proper ground for a Member and Minister of the Established Church, we have left for the present untouched, lest we should encroach upon that, which we hope to occupy on a future occasion. But it remains for us yet further to remark, that the use of our Liturgy is *acceptable to God.*

The words of our text are sufficient to shew us, that God does not look at fine words and fluent expressions, but at the heart. The Israelites had "well said all that they had spoken:" but whilst God acknowledged that, he added, "O that there were such *an heart* in them!" If there be humility and contrition in our supplications, it will make no difference with God, whether they be extemporaneous or pre-composed. Can any one doubt whether, if we were to address our heavenly Father in the words which Christ himself has taught us, we should be accepted of him, provided we uttered the different petitions from our hearts? As little doubt then is there that in the use of the Liturgy also we shall be accepted, if only we draw nigh to God with our hearts as well as with our lips. The prayer of faith, whether

whether with or without a form, shall never go forth in vain. And there are thousands at this day who can attest from their own experience, that they have often found God as present with them in the use of the public services of our Church, as ever they did in their secret chambers.

Thus we have endeavoured to vindicate the use of our Liturgy *generally*. We now come to vindicate it in reference to some particular Objections that have been urged against it.

The objections may be comprised under two heads; namely, That there are exceptionable expressions in the Liturgy; and, That the use of it necessarily generates formality.

To notice all the expressions which captious men have cavilled at, would be a waste of time. But there are one or two, which, with tender minds, have considerable weight, and have not only prevented many worthy men from entering into the Church, but do at this hour press upon the consciences of many, who in all other things approve and admire the public formularies of our Church. A great portion of this present assembly are educating with a view to the Ministry in the Establishment; and, if I may be able in any little measure to satisfy their minds, or to remove a stumbling-block out of their way, I shall think that I have made a good use of the opportunity which is thus afforded me. A more essential service I can scarcely render unto any of my younger brethren, or indeed to the Establishment itself, than by meeting fairly the difficulties which occur to their minds, and which are too often successfully urged by the enemies of our Church, to the embarrassing of conscientious minds, and to the drawing away of many, who might have laboured comfortably and successfully in this part of our Lord's vineyard.

There is one circumstance in the formation of our Liturgy, which is not sufficiently adverted to. The persons who composed it were men of a truly Apostolic spirit: unfettered by party prejudices, they endeavoured to speak in all things precisely as the

Scriptures speak: they did not indulge in speculations and metaphysical reasonings; nor did they presume to be wise above what is written: they laboured to speak the truth, the whole truth, in love: and they cultivated in the highest degree that candour, that simplicity, and that charity, which so eminently characterize all the Apostolic writings. Permit me to call your attention particularly to this point, because it will satisfactorily account for those expressions which seem most objectionable; and will shew precisely in what view we may most conscientiously repeat the language they have used.

In our Burial Service, we thank God for delivering our brother out of the miseries of this sinful world, and express a sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life, together with a hope also that our departed brother rests in Christ. Of course, it often happens, that we are called to use these expressions over persons who, there is reason to fear, have died in their sins; and then the question is, How we can with propriety use them? I answer, that, even according to the letter of the words, the use of them may be justified; because we speak not of *his*, but of *the*, resurrection to eternal life; and because, where we do not absolutely *know* that God has *not* pardoned a person, we may entertain *some* measure of hope that he *has*. But, taking the expressions more according to the spirit of them, they precisely accord with what we continually read in the Epistles of St. Paul. In the First Epistle to the Corinthian Church, he says of them, "I thank my God always on your behalf, that in every thing ye are enriched by him, in all utterance, and in all knowledge; even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you; so that *ye come behind in no gift*, waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." Yet, does he instantly begin to condemn the same persons, for their divisions and contentions; and afterwards tells them, "that they were carnal, and walked, not as saints, but as men," that is, as unconverted and ungodly men[1]. In like manner, in his Epistle

[1] 1 Cor. i. 4—7. & iii. 3.

Epistle to the Philippians, after saying, "I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, for your fellowship in the Gospel from the first day until now; being confident of this very thing, that he who hath begun a good work in you, will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ," he adds, "Even as it is meet for me to think this of you *all*[m]." Yet does he afterwards caution these very persons against strife, and vain-glory, and self-love; and tell them, that he will send Timothy to them shortly, in order to make inquiries into their state, and to give him information respecting them: and he even mentions two by name, Euodias and Syntyche, whose notorious disagreements he was desirous to heal.

A multitude of other passages might be cited to the same effect; to shew that the Apostles, in a spirit of candour and of love, spoke in terms of commendation respecting all, when in strictness of speech they should have made some particular exceptions. And, if we at this day were called to use the same language under the very same circumstances, it is probable that many would feel scruples respecting it, and especially, *in thanking God* for things, which, if pressed to the utmost meaning of the words, might not be strictly true. But surely, *if the Apostles in a spirit of love and charity used such language, we may safely and properly do the same: and knowing in what manner, and with what views, they spake, we need not hesitate to deliver ourselves with the same spirit, and in the same latitude, as they*[n].

In the Baptismal Service, we thank God for having regenerated the baptized infant by his Holy Spirit. Now from hence it appears that, in the opinion of our

[m] Phil. i. 3—7.

[n] To guard against a misapprehension of his meaning, the author wishes these words to be distinctly noticed; because they contain the whole drift of his argument.—He does not mean to say, that the Apostles ascribed salvation to the *opus operatum*, the outward act of baptism; or, that they intended to assert distinctly the salvation of every individual who had been baptized; but only that, in reference to these subjects, they did use a language very similar to that in our Liturgy, and that therefore our Reformers were justified, as we also are, in using the same.

our Reformers, regeneration and remission of sins did accompany baptism. But in what sense did they hold this sentiment? Did they maintain that there was no need for the seed then sown in the heart of the baptized person to grow up, and to bring forth fruit; or that he could be saved in any other way than by a progressive renovation of his soul after the Divine image? Had they asserted or countenanced any such doctrine as that, it would have been impossible for any enlightened person to concur with them. But nothing can be conceived more repugnant to their sentiments then such an idea as this: so far from harbouring such a thought, they have, and that too in this very prayer, taught us to look unto God for that total change both of heart and life, which, long since *their* days, has begun to be expressed by the term Regeneration. After thanking God for regenerating the infant by his Holy Spirit, we are taught to pray, "that he, being dead unto sin, and living unto righteousness, may crucify the old man, and *utterly abolish the whole body of sin*:" and then declaring that total change to be the necessary mean of his obtaining salvation, we add, "*So that* finally, with the residue of thy holy Church, *he may be* an inheritor of thine everlasting kingdom." Is there, I would ask, any person that can require more than this? or does God in his word require more? There are two things to be noticed in reference to this subject; the *term*, Regeneration, and the *thing*. The *term* occurs but twice in the Scriptures; in one place it refers to baptism, and is distinguished from the renewing of the Holy Ghost; which however is represented as attendant on it: and in the other place it has a totally distinct meaning unconnected with the subject. Now the *term* they use, as the Scripture uses it; and the *thing* they require, as strongly as any person can require it. They do not give us any reason to imagine that an adult person can be saved without experiencing all that modern Divines have included in the term Regeneration; on the contrary, they do, both there and throughout the whole Liturgy, insist

insist upon the necessity of a radical change both of heart and life. Here, then, the only question is, not, whether a baptized person can be saved by that ordinance without sanctification; but, whether God does always accompany the sign with the thing signified? Here is certainly room for difference of opinion: but it cannot be positively decided in the negative; because we cannot know, or even judge, respecting it, in any instance whatever, except by the fruits that follow: and therefore in all fairness it may be considered only as a doubtful point: and, if we appeal, as we ought to do, to the holy Scriptures, they certainly do in a very remarkable way accord with the expressions in our Liturgy. St. Paul says, "By one Spirit are we *all* baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been *all* made to *drink into one Spirit:*" and this he says of all the *visible* members of Christ's body[o]. Again, speaking of the whole nation of Israel, infants as well as adults, he says, "They were all baptized unto Moses, in the cloud, and in the sea; and did *all* eat the same *spiritual* meat; and did *all* drink the same *spiritual* drink; for they drank of that *spiritual* Rock that followed them: and *that Rock was Christ.*" (1 Cor. x. 1—4.) Yet behold, in the very next verse he tells us, that "with many of them God was displeased, and overthrew them in the wilderness." In another place he speaks yet more strongly still: "As many of you, says he, as are baptized into Christ, *have put on Christ:*" (Gal. iii. 27.) Here we see what is meant by the expression "baptized into Christ:" it is precisely the same expression as that before mentioned, of the Israelites being "baptized unto Moses;" (the preposition εἰς is used in both places;) it includes all that had been initiated into his religion by the rite of baptism: and of them universally does the Apostle say, "*They have put on Christ.*" Now I ask, Have not the persons who scruple

[o] 1 Cor. xii. 13—27.

scruple the use of that prayer in the Baptismal Service, equal reason to scruple the use of these different expressions?

Again—St. Peter says, Repent, and be baptized every one of you for the remission of sins; (Acts ii. 38, 39.) and in another place, "Baptism doth now save us;" (1 Pet. iii. 21.). And speaking elsewhere of baptized persons who were unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ, he says, "He hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins[p]." Does not this very strongly countenance the idea which our Reformers entertained, That the remission of our sins, as well as the Regeneration of our souls, is an attendant on the baptismal rite? Perhaps it will be said, that the inspired Writers spake of persons who had been baptized at an adult age. But, if they did so in some places, they certainly did not in others; and, where they did not, they must be understood as comprehending all, whether infants or adults: and therefore the language of our Liturgy, which is not a whit stronger than theirs, may be both subscribed and used without any just occasion of offence.

Let me then speak the truth before God: Though I am no Arminian, I do think that the refinements of Calvin have done great harm in the Church: they have driven multitudes from the plain and popular way of speaking used by the inspired Writers, and have made them unreasonably and unscripturally squeamish in their modes of expression; and I conceive that, the less addicted any person is to systematic accuracy, the more he will accord with the inspired Writers, and the more he will approve of the views of our Reformers. I do not mean however to say, that a slight alteration in two or three instances would not be an improvement; since it would take off a burthen from many minds, and supersede the necessity of laboured explanations: but I do mean to say, that there is no such objection to these expressions as to deter any conscientious person from giving his unfeigned assent and consent to the Liturgy

[p] 2 Pet. i. 9.

Liturgy altogether, or from using the particular expressions which we have been endeavouring to explain.

The other objection is, That the use of a Liturgy necessarily generates formality.

We have before acknowledged that the repetition of a form is less likely to arrest the attention, than that which is novel: but we by no means concede that it necessarily generates formality; on the contrary, we affirm, that if any person come to the service of the Church with a truly spiritual mind, he will find in our Liturgy what is calculated to call forth the devoutest exercises of his mind, far more than in any of the extemporaneous prayers which he would hear in other places.

We forbear to enter into a fuller elucidation of this point at present, because we should detain you too long; and we shall have a better opportunity of doing it in our next Discourse. But we would here intreat you all so far to bear this objection in your minds, as to cut off all occasion for it as much as possible, and, by the devout manner of your attendance on the services of the Church, to shew, that though you worship God with a form, you also worship him in spirit and in truth. Dissenters themselves know that the repetition of favourite hymns does not generate formality; and they may from thence learn, that the repetition of our excellent Liturgy is not really open to that objection. But they will judge from what they see amongst us: if they see that the prayers are read amongst us without any devotion, and that those who hear them are inattentive and irreverent during the service, they will not impute these evils to the true and proper cause, but to the Liturgy itself: and it is a fact, that they do from this very circumstance derive great advantage for the weakening of men's attachment to the Established Church, and for the augmenting of their own societies. Surely then it becomes us, who are annually sending forth so many Ministers into every quarter of the land, to

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pay particular attention to this point. I am well aware, that where such multitudes of young men are, it is not possible so to controul the inconsiderateness of youth, as to suppress all levity, or, to maintain that complete order that might be wished; but I know also, that the ingenuousness of youth is open to conviction upon a subject like this, and that even the strictest discipline upon a point so interwoven with the honour of the Establishment and the eternal interests of their own souls, would, in a little time, meet with a more cordial concurrence than is generally imagined: it would commend itself to their consciences, and call forth, not only their present approbation, but their lasting gratitude: and if Those who are in authority amongt us would lay this matter to heart, and devise means for the carrying it into full effect, more would be done for the upholding of the Establishment, than by ten thousand Discourses in vindication of it; and verily, if but the smallest progress should be made in it, I should think that I had "not laboured in vain, or run in vain."

But let us not so think of the Establishment as to forget our own souls: for, after all, the great question for the consideration of us all is, Whether we ourselves are accepted in the use of these prayers? And here, it is not outward reverence and decorum that will suffice; the heart must be engaged, as well as the lips. It will be to little purpose that God say, respecting us, "They have well said all that they have spoken," unless he see his own wish also accomplished, "O that there were in them such an heart! Indeed our prayers will be no more than a solemn mockery, if there be not a correspondence between the words of our lips and the feeling of our own souls: and his answer to us will be, like that to the Jews of old, "Ye hypocrites, in vain do ye worship me." Let all of us then bring our devotions to this test, and look well to it, that, with "the form, we have also the power of godliness." We are too apt to rush into the Divine presence

presence without any consciousness of the importance of the work in which we are going to be engaged, or any fear of his Majesty, whom we are going to address. If we would prevent formality in the house of God, we should endeavour to carry thither a devout spirit along with us, and guard against the very first incursion of vain thoughts and foolish imaginations. Let us then labour to attain such a sense of our own necessities, and of God's unbounded goodness, as shall produce a fixedness of mind, whenever we draw nigh to God in prayer; and for this end, let us ask of God the gift of his Holy Spirit to help our infirmities: and let us never think that we have used the Liturgy to any good purpose, unless it bring into our bosoms an inward witness of its utility, and a reasonable evidence of our acceptance with God in the use of it.

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## CXXXVI.

### EXCELLENCY OF THE LITURGY.

Deut. v. 28. 29. *They have well said all that they have spoken: O that there were such an heart in them!*

IN our preceding Discourses on this text, we first entered distinctly and fully into its true import, and then applied it, in an accommodated sense, to the Liturgy of our Established Church. The utility of a Liturgy being doubted by many, we endeavoured to vindicate the use of it, as lawful in itself, expedient for us, and acceptable to God. But it is not a mere vindication only which such a composition merits at our hands: the labour bestowed upon it has been exceeding great: our first Reformers omitted nothing that could conduce to the improvement of it: they consulted the most pious and learned of foreign Divines, and submitted it to them for their correction: and, since their time, there have been frequent revisions of it, in order that every expression which could be made a subject of cavil, might be amended: by which means, it has been brought to such a state of

of perfection, as no human composition of equal size and variety can pretend to.

To display its excellence, is the task, which, agreeably to the plan before proposed, is now assigned us; and we enter upon it with pleasure; in the hope, that those who have never yet studied the Liturgy, will learn to appreciate its value; and that all of us may be led to a more thankful and profitable use of it in future.

To judge of the Liturgy aright, we should contemplate, *Its spirituality and purity—Its fulness and suitableness—Its moderation and candour.*

1st, Its spirituality and purity.

It is well known that the services of the Church of Rome, from whose communion we separated, were full of superstition and error: they taught the people to rest in carnal ordinances, without either stimulating them to real piety, or establishing them on the foundation which God has laid. They contained, it is true, much that was good; but they were at the same time so filled with ceremonies of man's invention, and with doctrines repugnant to the Gospel, that they tended only to deceive and ruin all who adhered to them. In direct opposition to those services, we affirm, that the whole scope and tendency of our Liturgy is to raise our minds to a holy and heavenly state, and to build us up upon the Lord Jesus Christ as the only foundation of a sinner's hope.

Let us look at the *stated* services of our Church; let us call to mind all that we have heard or uttered, from the introductory sentences which were to prepare our minds, to the Dismission Prayer which closes the whole: there is nothing for show, but all for edification and spiritual improvement. Is humility the foundation of true piety? what deep humiliation is expressed in the General Confession, and throughout the Litany; as also in supplicating forgiveness, after every one of the Commandments, for our innumerable violations of them all! Is faith in the Lord Jesus Christ the way appointed for our reconci-

reconciliation with God? we ask for every blessing solely in his Name and for his sake; and with the holy vehemence of importunity, we urge with him the consideration of all that he has done and suffered for us, as our plea for mercy; and, at the Lord's Supper, we mark so fully our affiance in his atoning blood, that it is impossible for any one to use those prayers aright, without seeing and feeling that "there is no other name under heaven but his, whereby we can be saved."

The same we may observe respecting the *Occasional* Services of our Church. From our very birth even to the grave, our Church omits nothing that can tend to the edification of its members. At our first introduction into the Church, with what solemnity are we dedicated to God in our Baptismal Service! What pledges does our Church require of our Sponsors, that we shall be brought up in the true faith and fear of God; and how earnestly does she lead us to pray for a progressive, total, and permanent renovation of our souls! No sooner are we capable of receiving instruction, than she provides for us, and expressly requires that we be well instructed in, a Catechism, so short that it burthens the memory of none, and so comprehensive that it contains all that is necessary for our information at that early period of our life. When once we are taught, by that, to know the nature and extent of our baptismal vows, the Church calls upon us to renew in our own person the vows that were formerly made for us in our name; and, in a service specially prepared for that purpose, leads us to consecrate ourselves to God; thus endeavouring to *confirm* us in our holy resolutions, and to establish us in the faith of Christ. Not content with having thus initiated, instructed, and confirmed her members in the religion of Christ, the Church embraces every occasion of instilling into our minds the knowledge and love of his ways. If we change our condition in life, we are required to come to the altar of our God, and there devote ourselves afresh to him,

and

and implore his blessing, from which alone all true happiness proceeds. Are mercies and deliverances vouchsafed to any, especially that great mercy of preservation from the pangs and perils of child-birth? the Church appoints a public acknowledgment to be made to Almighty God in the presence of the whole congregation, and provides a suitable service for that end. In like manner, for every public mercy, or in time of any public calamity, particular prayers and thanksgivings are provided for our use. In a time of sickness there is also very particular provision made for our instruction and consolation: and even after death, when she can no more benefit the deceased, the Church labours to promote the benefit of her surviving members, by a service the most solemn and impressive that ever was formed. Thus attentive is she to supply in every thing, as far as human endeavours can avail, our spiritual wants; being decent in her forms, but not superstitious; and strong in her expressions, but not erroneous. In short, it is not possible to read the Liturgy with candour, and not to see that the welfare of our souls is the one object of the whole; and that the compilers of it had nothing in view, but that in all our works begun, continued, and ended in God, we should glorify his holy Name.

The excellencies of our Liturgy will yet further appear, while we notice, next, its *fulness and suitableness.*

Astonishing is the wisdom with which the Liturgy is adapted to the edification of every member of the Church. There is no case that is overlooked, no sin that is not deplored, no want that is not specified, no blessing that is not asked: yet, whilst every particular is entered into so far that every individual person may find his own case adverted to, and his own wishes expressed, the whole is so carefully worded, that no person is led to express more than he ought to feel, or to deliver sentiments in which he may not join with his whole heart. Indeed there is a minuteness in the petitions that is rarely found even in men's

men's private devotions; and those very particularities are founded in the deepest knowledge of the human heart, and the completest view of men's spiritual necessities: for instance, We pray to God to deliver us, not only in all time of our tribulation, but *in all time of our wealth also;* because we are quite as much in danger of being drawn from God by prosperity, as by adversity; and need his aid as much in the one as in the other.

In the intercessory part of our devotions also, our sympathy is called forth in behalf of all orders and degrees of men, under every name and every character that can be conceived. We pray to him, to strengthen *such as do stand,* to comfort and help *the weak-hearted,* and to raise up *them that fall,* and finally, to beat down Satan under our feet. We intreat him also to succour, help, and comfort *all that are in danger, necessity, and tribulation.* We further supplicate him in behalf of *all that travel,* whether *by land or by water,* all *women labouring of child,* all *sick persons,* and *young children,* and particularly intreat him to have pity upon all *prisoners* and *captives.* Still further, we plead with him to defend and provide for the *fatherless children,* and *widows,* and *all that are desolate and oppressed:* and, lest any should have been omitted, we beg him "to have mercy upon *all men,*" generally, and more particularly "to forgive our *enemies, persecutors,* and *slanderers,* and to turn their hearts." In what other prayers, whether extemporaneous or written, shall we ever find such diffusive benevolence as this?

In a word, there is no possible situation in which we can be placed, but the prayers are precisely suited to us; nor can we be in any frame of mind, wherein they will not express our feelings as strongly and forcibly, as any person could express them even in his secret chamber. Take a broken-hearted penitent; where can he ever find words, wherein to supplicate the mercy of his God, more congenial with his feelings than in the Litany, where he renews his application to each person of the Sacred Trinity for mercy,

mercy, under the character of a miserable sinner? Hear him when kneeling before the altar of his God: "Almighty God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Maker of all things, Judge of all men; we acknowledge and bewail our manifold sins and wickedness, which we from time to time most grievously have committed, by thought, word, and deed, against thy Divine Majesty, provoking most justly thy wrath and indignation against us. We do earnestly repent, and are heartily sorry for these our misdoings; the remembrance of them is grievous unto us, the burthen of them is intolerable. Have mercy upon us, have mercy upon us, most merciful Father! For thy Son our Lord Jesus Christ's sake, forgive us all that is past, And grant that we may ever hereafter serve and please thee in newness of life, to the honour and glory of thy Name, through Jesus Christ our Lord!" —I may venture to say that no finite wisdom could suggest words more suited to the feelings or necessities of a penitent, than these.

Take, next, a person full of faith and of the Holy Ghost; and if he were the devoutest of all the human race, he could never find words, wherein to give scope to all the exercises of his mind, more suitable than in the *Te Deum*: "We praise thee, O God: we acknowledge thee to be the Lord. All the earth doth worship thee, the Father everlasting. To thee all Angels cry aloud, the heavens, and all the Powers therein: To thee Cherubin and Seraphin continually do cry, Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of Sabaoth; heaven and earth are full of the Majesty of thy glory." —Hear him also at the table of the Lord: "It is very meet, right, and our bounden duty, that we should at all times, and in all places, give thanks unto thee, O Lord, holy Father, Almighty, everlasting God: Therefore with angels and archangels, and with all the company of heaven, we laud and magnify thy glorious Name, evermore praising thee, and saying, Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of Hosts, heaven and earth are full of thy glory: Glory be to thee, O Lord Most High."

Even

Even where there are no particular exercises of the mind, the Liturgy is calculated to produce the greatest possible good: for the gravity and sobriety of the whole service are fitted to impress the most careless sinner; whilst the various portions of Scripture that are read out of the Old and New Testament, not only for the Lessons of the day, but from the Psalms also, and from the Epistles and Gospels, are well adapted to arrest the attention of the thoughtless, and to convey instruction to the most ignorant. Indeed I consider it as one of the highest excellencies of our Liturgy, that it is calculated to make us wise, intelligent, and sober Christians: it marks a golden mean; it affects and inspires a meek, humble, modest, sober piety, equally remote from the unmeaning coldness of a formalist, the self-importance of a systematic dogmatist, and the unhallowed fervour of a wild enthusiast. A *tender seriousness*, a *meek devotion*, and an *humble joy*, are the qualities which it was intended, and is calculated, to produce in all her members.

It remains that we yet further trace the excellence of our Liturgy, in its *Moderation and Candour*.

The whole Christian world has from time to time been agitated with controversies of different kinds; and human passions have grievously debased the characters and actions even of good men in every age. But it should seem that the compilers of our Liturgy were inspired with a wisdom and moderation peculiar to themselves. They kept back no truth whatever, through fear of giving offence; yet were careful so to state every truth, as to leave those inexcusable who should recede from the Church on account of any sentiments which she maintained. In this, they imitated the inspired penmen; who do not dwell on doctrines after the manner of human systems, but introduce them incidentally, as it were, as occasion suggests, and bring them forward always in connexion with practical duties. The various perfections of God are all stated in different parts; but all in such a way, as, without affording any occasion

for dispute, tends effectually to encourage us in our addresses to him. The Godhead of Christ is constantly asserted, and different prayers are expressly addressed to him; but nothing is said in a way of contentious disputation. The influences of the Holy Spirit, from whom all holy desires, all good counsels, and all just works do proceed, are stated; and "the inspiration of the Holy Spirit is sought, in order that we may perfectly love God, and worthily magnify his holy Name:" but all is conveyed in a way of humble devotion, without reflections upon others, or even a word that can lead the thoughts to controversy of any kind. Even the deepest doctrines of our holy religion are occasionally brought forth in a practical view (in which view alone they ought to be regarded;) that, whilst we contemplate them as truths, we may experience their sanctifying efficacy on our hearts. The truth, the whole truth, is brought forward, without fear; but it is brought forward also without offence: all is temperate; all is candid; all is practical; all is peaceful; and every word is spoken in love. This is an excellency that deserves particular notice, because it is so contrary to what is found in the worship of those whose addresses to the Most High God depend on the immediate views and feelings of an individual person, which may be, and not unfrequently are, tinctured in a lamentable degree by party-views and unhallowed passions. And we shall do well to bear in mind this excellency, in order that we may imitate it; and that we may shew to all, that the moderation which so eminently characterizes the Offices of our Church, is no less visible in all her members.

Sorry should I be, when speaking on this amiable virtue, to transgress it even in the smallest degree: but I appeal to all who hear me, whether there be not a want of this virtue in the temper of the present times; and whether if our Reformers themselves were to rise again and live amongst us, their pious sentiments and holy lives would not be, with many, an occasion of offence? I need not repeat the terms

which

which are used to stigmatize those who labour to walk in their paths; nor will I speak of the jealousies which are entertained against those, who live only to inculcate what our Reformers taught. You need not be told that even the moderate sentiments of our Reformers are at this day condemned by many as dangerous errors; and the very exertions, whereby alone the knowledge of them can be communicated unto men, are imputed to vanity, and loaded with blame. But, though I thus speak, I must acknowledge, to the glory of God, that in no place have moderation and candour shone more conspicuous, than in this distinguished seat of literature and science: and I pray God, that the exercise of these virtues may be richly recompensed from the Lord into every bosom, and be followed with all the other graces that accompany salvation.

From this view of our subject it will be naturally asked, Do I then consider the Liturgy as altogether perfect? I answer, No: it is a human composition; and there is nothing human that can claim so high a title as that of absolute perfection. There are certainly some few expressions which might be altered for the better, and which in all probability would have been altered at the Conference which was appointed for the last revision of it, if the unreasonable scrupulosity of some, and the unbending pertinacity of others, had not defeated the object of that assembly. I have before mentioned two, which, though capable of being vindicated, might admit of some improvement. And, as I have been speaking strongly of the moderation and candour of the Liturgy, I will here bring forward the only exception to it that I am aware of; and that is found in the Athanasian Creed. The damnatory clauses contained in that Creed, do certainly breathe a very different spirit from that which pervades every other part of our Liturgy. As to the doctrine of the Creed, it is perfectly sound, and such as ought to be universally received. But it is matter of regret that any should be led to pronounce a sentence of damnation against their fellow-

creatures, in any case where God himself has not clearly and certainly pronounced it. Yet whilst I say this, permit me to add, that I think this Creed does not express, nor ever was intended to express, so much as is generally supposed. The part principally objected to, is that whole statement, which is contained between the first assertion of the doctrine of the Trinity, and the other articles of our faith: and the objection is, that the damnatory clauses which would be justifiable, if confined to the general assertion respecting the doctrine of the Trinity, become unjustifiable, when extended to the whole of that which is annexed to it. But, if we suppose that this intermediate part was intended as an *explanation* of the doctrine in question, we still, I think, ought not to be understood as affirming respecting that explanation all that we affirm respecting the doctrine itself. If any one will read the Athanasian Creed with attention, he will find three damnatory clauses; one at the beginning, which is confined to the general doctrine of the Trinity; another at the close of what, for argument sake, we call the explanation of that doctrine; and another at the end, relating to the other articles of the Creed, such as the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Christ, and his coming at the last day to judge the world. Now, whoever will compare the three clauses, will find a marked difference between them: those which relate to the general doctrine of the Trinity, and to the other articles of the Creed, are strong; asserting positively that the points must be *believed*, and that too on *pain of everlasting damnation:* but that which is annexed to the *explanation* of the doctrine, asserts only, that a man who is in earnest about his salvation *ought* to *think* thus of the Trinity. The words in the original are, Qui *vult* ergo salvus esse, *ita* de Trinitate *sentiat:* and this shews in what sense we are to understand the more ambiguous language of our translation: "He therefore that *will* be saved, (i. e. *is willing* or desirous to be saved,) *must* thus think *(let him* thus think) of the Trinity." Thus it appears

appears that the things contained in the beginning and end of the Creed are spoken of as matters of *faith;* but this, which is inserted in the midst, as a matter of *opinion* only: in reference to the first and last parts the certainty of damnation is asserted; but in reference to the intermediate part, nothing is asserted, except that such are the views which we *ought* to entertain of the point in question. Now I would ask, was this difference the effect of chance? or rather, was it not actually intended, in order to guard against the very objection that is here adduced?

This, then, is the answer which we give, on the supposition that the part which appears so objectionable, is to be considered as an *explanation* of the doctrine in question. But what, if it was never intended as an *explanation?* What, if it contains only a *proof* of that doctrine, and an appeal to our reason, that that doctrine is true? Yet, if we examine the Creed, we shall find this to be the real fact. Let us in few words point out the steps of the argument.

The Creed says, "The Catholic faith is this, That we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity; neither confounding the persons, nor dividing the substance:" and then it proceeds, "FOR there is one person of the Father," and so on; and then, after *proving* the distinct personality of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, and their unity in the Godhead, it adds, "SO THAT in all things as is aforesaid, the Unity in Trinity, and the Trinity in Unity, is to be worshipped. He THEREFORE that will be saved, must thus think of the Trinity." Here are all the distinct parts of an argument. The position affirmed—the proofs adduced—the deduction made—and the conclusion drawn in reference to the importance of receiving and acknowledging that doctrine.

From hence, then, I infer, that the damnatory clauses should be understood only in reference to the doctrine affirmed, and not be extended to the parts which are adduced only in confirmation of it:

and,

and, if we believe that the doctrine of the Trinity is a fundamental article of the Christian faith, we may without any breach of charity apply to that doctrine what our Lord spake of the Gospel at large, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned."

Thus, in either view, the use of the Creed may be vindicated: for, if we consider the obnoxious part as *an explanation*, the terms requiring it to be received are intentionally softened; and if we consider it as *a proof*, it is to the doctrines proved, and not to the proof annexed, that the damnatory clauses are fairly applicable.

Still, after all, I confess, that if the same candour and moderation that are observable in all other parts of the Liturgy had been preserved here, it would have been better. For though I do verily believe, that those who deny the doctrine of the Trinity are in a fatal error, and will find themselves so at the day of judgment, I would rather deplore the curse that awaits them, than denounce it; and rather weep over them in my secret chamber, than utter anathemas against them in the house of God.

I hope I have now met the question of our Liturgy fairly. I have not confined myself to general assertions, but have set forth the difficulties which are supposed to exist against it, and have given such a solution of them as I think is sufficient to satisfy any conscientious mind: though it is still matter of regret that any laboured explanation of them should be necessary.

Now then, acknowledging that our Liturgy is not absolutely perfect, and that those who most admire it would be glad if these few blemishes were removed; have we not still abundant reason to be thankful for it? Let its excellencies be fairly weighed, and its blemishes will sink into nothing; let its excellencies be duly appreciated, and every person in the kingdom will acknowledge himself deeply indebted to those, who with so much care and piety compiled it.

But

But these blemishes *alone* are seen by multitudes; and its excellencies are altogether forgotten: yea, moreover, frequent occasion is taken from these blemishes to persuade men to renounce their communion with the Established Church, in the hopes of finding a purer worship elsewhere. With what justice such arguments are urged, will best appear by a comparison between the prayers that are offered elsewhere, and those that are offered in the Established Church. There are about 11,000 places of worship in the Established Church, and about as many out of it. Now take the prayers that are offered on any sabbath in all places out of the Establishment; have them all written down, and every expression sifted and scrutinized as our Liturgy has been: then compare them with the prayers that have been offered in all the Churches of the kingdom; and see what comparison the extemporaneous effusions will bear with our pre-composed forms. Having done this for *one sabbath*, proceed to do it for *a year;* and then, after a similar examination, compare them again: were this done, (and done it ought to be in order to form a correct judgment on the case,) methinks there is scarcely a man in the kingdom that would not fall down on his knees, and bless God for the Liturgy of the Established Church.

All that is wanting is, *an heart suited to the Liturgy*, and cast as it were into that mould. It may with truth be said of us, "They have well said all that they have spoken: O that there were in them such an heart!" Let us only suppose that on any particular occasion there were in all of us such a state of mind as the Liturgy is suited to express; what glorious worship would ours be! and how certainly would God delight to hear and bless us! We will not say that he would come down and fill the house with his visible glory, as he did in the days of Moses and of Solomon; but we will say, that he would come down and fill our souls with such a sense of his presence and love, as would transform us into his blessed image, and constitute a very heaven upon

upon earth. Let each of us, then, adopt the wish in our text, and say, "O that there *may be* in me such an heart!" Let us cultivate the *moderation and candour* which are there exhibited; divesting ourselves of all prejudice against religion, and receiving with impartial readiness the whole counsel of our God. More particularly, whenever we come up to the house of God, let us seek those very dispositions in the use of the Liturgy, which our Reformers exercised in the framing of it. Let us bring with us into the presence of our God that *spirituality of mind* that shall fit us for communion with him, and that *purity of heart* which is the commencement of the Divine image on the soul. Let us study, whenever we join in the different parts of this Liturgy, to get our hearts *suitably impressed* with the work in which we are engaged; that our confessions may be humble, our petitions fervent, our thanksgivings devout, and our whole souls obedient to the word we hear. In a word, let us not be satisfied with any attainments, but labour to be holy as God himself is holy, and perfect even as our Father which is in heaven is perfect. If now a doubt remain on the mind of any individual respecting the transcendent excellence of the Liturgy, let him only take the Litany, and go through every petition of it attentively, and at the close of every petition ask himself, What sort of a person should I be, if this petition were so answered to me, that I lived henceforth according to it? and what kind of a world would this be, if all the people that were in it experienced the same answer, and walked according to the same model? If, for instance, we were all from this hour delivered "from all blindness of heart; from pride, vain-glory, and hypocrisy; from envy, hatred, and malice, and all uncharitableness;" if we were delivered also "from all other deadly sin, and from all the deceits of the world, the flesh, and the devil;" what happiness should we not possess? How happy would *the Church* be, if it should "please God to illuminate all bishops, priests, and deacons with true knowledge and

and understanding of his word, so that both by their preaching and living they did set it forth and shew it accordingly!" How blessed also would *the whole nation* be, if it pleased God to "endue the Lords of the Council, and all the nobility, with grace, wisdom, and understanding: and to bless and keep the magistrates, giving them grace to execute justice and to maintain truth; and further to bless all his people throughout the land!" Yea, what *a world* would this be, if from this moment God should "give to all nations, unity, peace, and concord!" Were these prayers once answered, we should hear no more complaints of our Liturgy, nor ever wish for any thing *in public*, better than that which is provided for us. May God hasten forward that happy day, when all the assemblies of his people throughout the land shall enter fully into the spirit of these prayers, and be answered in the desire of their hearts; receiving from him an "increase of grace, to hear meekly his word, to receive it with pure affection, and to bring forth the fruits of the Spirit!" And to us in particular may he give, even to every individual amongst us, "true repentance; and forgive us all our sins, negligences, and ignorances; and endue us with the grace of his Holy Spirit, that we may amend our lives according to his holy word." Amen and Amen.

## CXXXVII.

### EXCELLENCY OF THE LITURGY.

Deut. v. 28, 29. *They have well said all that they have spoken: O that there were such an heart in them!*

THE further we proceed in the investigation of our Liturgy, the more we feel the difficulty of doing justice to it. Such is the spirit which it breathes throughout, that if only a small measure of its piety existed in all the different congregations in which it is used, we should be as holy and as happy a people as ever the Jews were in the most distinguished periods

periods of their history. If this object has not been yet attained, it is not the fault of our Reformers: they have done all that men could do, to transmit to the latest posterity the blessings which they themselves had received: and there is not a member of our Church, who has not reason to bless God, every day of his life, for their labours. But they knew that it would be to little purpose to provide suitable forms of prayer for every different occasion, if they did not also secure, as far as human wisdom could secure, a succession of men, who, actuated by the same ardent piety as themselves, should perform the different offices to the greatest advantage, and carry on by their personal ministrations the blessed work which *they* had begun. Here therefore they bestowed the utmost care; marking with precision what were the qualifications requisite for the ministerial office, and binding, in the most solemn manner, all who should be consecrated to it, to a diligent and faithful discharge of their respective duties.

When we first spake of the Liturgy, we proposed, after vindicating its use, and displaying its excellency, to direct your attention to one particular part, which on that account we should reserve for a distinct and fuller consideration. The part we had in view was, The Ordination Service. We are aware, indeed, that in calling your attention so particularly to that, we stand on delicate ground: but, being aware of it, we shall take the greater care that no one shall have reason to complain of want of delicacy. It is the candour that has invariably manifested itself in this congregation, that emboldens me to bring this subject before you. Any attempt to discuss the merits of the Liturgy would indeed be incomplete, if we omitted to notice that part, which so pre-eminently displays its highest excellencies, and is peculiarly appropriate to the audience which I have the honour to address. I trust therefore I shall not be thought assuming, as though I had any pretensions to exalt myself above the least and lowest of my brethren. I well know, that, if my own deficiencies were far less than they are,

are, it would ill become me to take any other than the lowest place; and much more, when I am conscious that they are so great and manifold. For my own humiliation, no less than that of others, I enter on the task; and I pray God, that, whilst I am shewing what our Reformers inculcated as pertaining to the pastoral office, we may all apply the subject to ourselves, and intreat help from God, that, as "we have well said all that we have spoken, so there may be in us such an heart."

There are three things to be noticed in the Ordination Service, Our *professions*, our *promises*, and our *prayers*: after considering which, we shall endeavour to excite, in all, that desire, which God has so tenderly, and so affectionately, expressed in our behalf.

Let me begin, then, with calling your attention to the *professions* which we make, when first we become candidates for the ministerial office.

So sacred was the priesthood under the Law, that no man presumed to take it upon himself, but he who was called to it by God, as Aaron was. And though the priesthood of our blessed Lord was of a totally distinct kind from that which shadoweth it forth, "yet did he not glorify himself to be made an high priest," but was so constituted by his heavenly Father, who committed to him that office "after the order of Melchizedec." Some call therefore, as from God himself, is to be experienced by all who devote themselves to the service of the sanctuary. Of this our Reformers were convinced: and hence they required the ordaining bishop to put to every candidate that should come before him, this solemn interrogation; "Do you trust that you are inwardly moved by the Holy Ghost to take upon you this office?" to which he answers, "I trust so."

Now I am far from intimating that this call, which every candidate for Orders professes to have received, resembles that which was given to the Apostles: it is certainly not to be understood as though it were a voice or suggestion coming directly from the Holy Ghost; for though God *may* reveal his will in this manner,

manner, just as he did in the days of old, yet we have no reason to think that he *does*. The motion here spoken of is less perceptible: it does not carry its own evidence along with it; (as did that which in an instant prevailed on the Apostles to forsake their worldly business, and to follow Christ;) but it disposes the mind in a gradual and silent way to enter into the service of God; partly from a sense of obligation to him for his redeeming love, partly from a compassion for the ignorant and perishing multitudes around us, and partly from a desire to be an honoured instrument in the Redeemer's hands to establish and enlarge his kingdom in the world. Less than this cannot reasonably be supposed to be comprehended in that question: and the way to answer it with a good conscience is, to examine ourselves whether we have an eye to our own ease, honour, or preferment; or, whether we have really a love to the souls of men, and a desire to promote the honour of our God? The question, in this view of it, gives no scope for enthusiasm, nor does it leave any room for doubt upon the mind of him that is to answer it: every man may tell, whether he feels so deeply the value of his own soul, as to be anxious also for the souls of others; and whether, independent of worldly considerations, he has such love to the Lord Jesus Christ, as to desire above all things to advance his glory. These feelings are not liable to be mistaken, because they are always accompanied with corresponding actions, and always productive of appropriate fruits.

Now in all cases where this profession has been made, it may be said, "They have well said all that they have spoken." For this profession is a public acknowledgment that such a call is necessary: and it serves as a barrier to exclude from the sacred office many, who would otherwise have undertaken it from worldly motives. And though it is true, that too many break through this barrier, yet it stands as a witness against them, and in very many instances an effectual witness; testifying to their consciences, that

that they have come to God with a lie in their right hand, and making them to tremble, lest they should be condemned at the tribunal of their God, for having, like Ananias and Sapphira, lied unto the Holy Ghost. Yes, very many, who have lightly uttered these words when they first entered into the Ministry, have been led by them afterwards to examine their motives more attentively, and to humble themselves for the iniquity they have committed, and to surrender up themselves with redoubled energy to the service of their God. Though therefore we regret that any should make this profession on insufficient grounds, we rejoice that it is required of all: and we pray God, that all who have made it, may reconsider it with the attention it deserves; and that all who propose to make it, may pause, till they have maturely weighed the import of their assertion, and can call God himself to attest the truth of it.

Let us next turn our attention to the *promises*, by which we bind ourselves on that occasion.

In the service for the Ordination of Priests, there is an exhortation from the bishop, which every Minister would do well to read at least once every year. To give a just view of this part of our Liturgy, we must briefly open to you the contents of that exhortation; the different parts of which are afterwards brought before us in the shape of questions, to every one of which a distinct and solemn answer is demanded, as in the presence of the heart-searching God. The exhortation consists of two parts; in the first of which *we are enjoined to consider the importance of that high office to which we are called;* and in the second, *we are urged to exert ourselves to the uttermost in the discharge of it.*

In reference to the former of these, it speaks thus: "Now we exhort you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you have in remembrance, into how high a dignity, and to how weighty an office and charge, ye are called: that is to say, to be Messengers, Watchmen, and Stewards of the Lord; to teach and to premonish, to feed and provide for the Lord's family;

family; to seek for Christ's sheep that are dispersed abroad, and for his children who are in the midst of this naughty world, that they may be saved through Christ for ever."

Where in such few words can we find so striking a representation of the dignity of our office, as in this address? We are "Messengers" from the Most High God, to instruct men in the knowledge of his will, and to communicate to them the glad tidings of salvation through the mediation of his Son: we are "Watchmen," to warn them of their danger, whilst they continue without an interest in Christ: and we are "Stewards," to superintend his household, and to deal out to every one of his servants, from day to day, whatsoever their respective necessities require. Now, if we occupied such an office in the house of an earthly monarch only, our dignity were great; but to be thus engaged in the service of the King of kings, is an honour far greater than the temporal government of the whole universe. Should we not, then, bear in mind what an office is devolved upon us?

From speaking thus respecting *the dignity of the ministry*, it proceeds to speak of *the importance of the trust* committed to us: "Have always therefore printed in your remembrance, how great *a treasure* is committed to your charge: for they are the sheep of Christ, which he bought with his death, and for whom he shed his blood. The congregation whom you must serve, is "his spouse, and his body." What a tender and affecting representation is here! The souls committed to our care are represented as "the sheep of Christ, which he bought with his death, and for which he shed his blood." What bounds would there be to our exertions, if we considered as we ought, that we are engaged in that very work, for which our Lord Jesus Christ came down from the bosom of his Father, and shed his blood upon the cross; and that to us he looks for the completion of his efforts in the salvation of a ruined world? Further still, they are represented as "the spouse and body of Christ," whose welfare ought to be infinitely dearer

dearer to us than life itself. We know what concern men would feel if the life of their own spouse, or of their own body, were in danger, though they could only hope to protract for a few years a frail and perishable existence: what, then, ought we not to feel for "the spouse and body of Christ," whose everlasting welfare is dependent on our exertions!

After thus impressing on our minds the importance of our office, the exhortation proceeds in the next place to urge us to a diligent performance of it. It reminds us, that we are answerable to God for every soul committed to our charge; that there must be no limit to our exertions, except what the capacity of our minds and the strength of our bodies have assigned. It calls upon us to use all the means in our power to qualify ourselves for the discharge of it, by withdrawing ourselves from worldly cares, worldly pleasures, worldly studies, worldly habits and pursuits of every kind, in order to fix the whole bent of our minds on the study of the holy Scriptures, and of those things which will assist us in the understanding of them. It directs us to be instant in prayer to God for the assistance of his Holy Spirit, by whose gracious influences alone we shall be enabled to fulfil our duties aright. And, finally, it enjoins us so to regulate our own lives, and so to govern our respective families, that we may be patterns to all around us; and that we may be able to address our congregations in the language of St. Paul, "Whatsoever ye have heard and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you." But it will be satisfactory to you to hear the very words of the exhortation itself: "If it shall happen the same Church, or any member thereof, to take any hurt or hinderance by reason of your negligence, ye know the greatness of the fault, and also the horrible punishment that will ensue. Wherefore consider with yourselves the end of your ministry towards the children of God, towards the spouse and body of Christ; and see that you *never cease your labour, your care and diligence,* until you have done *all that lieth in you,* according

according to your bounden duty, to bring all such as are or shall be committed to your charge unto that agreement in the faith and knowledge of God, and to that ripeness and perfectness of age in Christ, that there be no place left among you, either for error in religion, or for viciousness of life."

"Forasmuch then as your office is both of so great excellency, and of so great difficulty, ye see with how great care and study ye ought to apply yourselves, as well that ye may shew yourselves dutiful and thankful unto that Lord who hath placed you in so high a dignity; as also to beware that neither you yourselves offend, nor be the occasion that others offend. Howbeit ye cannot have a mind and will thereto of yourselves; for that will and ability is given of God alone: therefore ye ought, and have need to pray earnestly for his Holy Spirit. And seeing that you cannot by any other means compass the doing of so weighty a work, pertaining to the salvation of man, but with doctrine and exhortation taken out of the holy Scriptures, and with a life agreeable to the same; consider how studious ye ought to be in reading and learning the Scriptures, and in framing the manners both of yourselves and of them that specially pertain unto you, according to the rule of the same Scriptures: and for this self-same cause, how ye ought to forsake and set aside (as much as you may) all worldly cares and studies."

Here let us pause a moment, to reflect, what stress our Reformers laid on the holy Scriptures, as the only sure directory for our faith and practice, and the only certain rule of all our ministrations. They have clearly given it as their sentiment, that to study the word of God ourselves, and to open it to others, is the proper labour of a Minister; a labour, that calls for all his time, and all his attention: and, by this zeal of theirs in behalf of the Inspired Volume, they were happily successful in bringing it into general use. But, if they could look down upon us at this time, and see what an unprecedented zeal has pervaded all ranks and orders of men amongst us for the

the dissemination of that truth, which they, at the expence of their own lives, transmitted to us; how would they rejoice and leap for joy! Yet, methinks, if they cast an eye upon this favoured spot, and saw, that, whilst the Lord Jesus Christ is thus exalted in almost every other place, we are lukewarm in his cause; and whilst thousands all around us are emulating each other in exertions to extend his kingdom through the world, we, who are so liberal on other occasions, have not yet appeared in his favour; they would be ready to rebuke our tardiness, as David did the indifference of Judah, from whom he had reason to expect the most active support; "Why are ye the last to bring the king back to his house? seeing the speech of all Israel is come to the king, even to his house[a]," But I am persuaded, that there is nothing wanting but that a suitable proposal be made by some person of influence amongst us; and we shall soon approve ourselves worthy sons of those pious ancestors. I would hope there is not an individual amongst us, who would not gladly lend his aid, that "the word of the Lord may run and be glorified," not in this kingdom only, but, if possible, throughout all the earth.

But to return to the bishop's exhortation. "We have good hope that you have well weighed and pondered these things with yourselves long before this time; and that you have clearly determined, by God's grace, to *give yourselves wholly to this office*, whereunto it hath pleased God to call you, so that, as much as lieth in you, you will *apply yourselves wholly* to this one thing, and draw all your cares and studies this way: and that you will continually pray to God the Father, by the mediation of our only Saviour Jesus Christ, for the heavenly assistance of the Holy Ghost; that by daily reading and weighing of the Scriptures, ye may wax riper and stronger in your ministry, and that ye may so endeavour yourselves from time to time to sanctify the lives of you and

[a] 2 Sam. xix. 11.

and yours, and to fashion them after the rule and doctrine of Christ, that ye may be wholesome and godly examples and patterns for the people to follow."

After this, the bishop, calling upon the candidates, in the name of God and of his Church, to give a plain and solemn answer to the questions which he shall propose to them, puts the substance of the exhortation into several distinct questions; two of which only, for brevity sake, we will repeat: "Will you be diligent in prayers, and in reading of the holy Scriptures, and in such studies as help to the knowledge of the same, laying aside the study of the world and the flesh?" To which we answer; "I will endeavour myself so to do, the Lord being my helper." Then he asks again; "Will you be diligent to frame and fashion your ownselves and your families according to the doctrine of Christ, and to make both yourselves and them, as much as in you lieth, wholesome examples and patterns to the flock of Christ?" To which we answer, "I will apply myself thereto, the Lord being my helper."

These are the promises which we make before God in the most solemn manner at the time of our ordination. Now I would ask, Can any human Being entertain a doubt, whether, in making these promises, we have not "well said all that we have spoken?" Can any of us say, that too much has been required of us? Do we not see and feel, that, as the honour of the office is great, so is the difficulty of performing it aright, and the danger of performing it in a negligent and heartless manner? If a man undertake any office that requires indefatigable exertion, and that involves the temporal interests of men to a great extent, we expect of that man the utmost diligence and care. If, then, such be expected of the servants of *men*, where temporal interests only are affected, what must be expected of the servants of *God*, where the eternal interests of men, and the everlasting honour of God, are so deeply concerned? I say again, We cannot but approve the promises we have made; and, methinks, God himself,

himself, when he heard our vows, expressed his approbation of them, saying, "They have well said all that they have spoken."

We come, lastly, to mention our *prayers*, which were offered to God on that occasion.

And here we have one of the most pious and affecting institutions that ever was established upon earth. The bishop, who during the preceding exhortation and questions has been seated in his chair, now rises up, and in a standing posture makes his earnest supplication to God in behalf of all the candidates, in these words: "Almighty God, who hath given you this will to do all these things, grant also unto you strength and power to perform the same; that he may accomplish his work which he had begun in you, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen." After this a request is made to the whole congregation then present, to offer up their prayers in secret to God, and to make their supplications to God for all these things. And, that they may have time to do so, it is appointed, that *silence shall be kept for a space*; the public services being for a while suspended, in order to give the congregation an opportunity of pouring out their souls before God in behalf of the persons who are to be ordained.

What an idea does this give us of the sanctity of our office, and of the need we have of Divine assistance for the performance of it! and how beautifully does it intimate to the people, the interest they have in an efficient ministry! Surely, if they felt, as they ought, their need of spiritual instruction, they would never discontinue their prayers for those who are placed over them in the Lord, but would plead in their behalf night and day.

After a sufficient time has been allowed for these private devotions, a hymn to the Holy Ghost is introduced; (*the candidates all continuing in a kneeling posture;*) a hymn which, in beauty of composition and spirituality of import, cannot easily be surpassed. Time will not allow me to make any observations upon it; but it would be a great injustice to our

Liturgy, if I should omit to recite it: and it will be a profitable employment, if, whilst we recite it, we all adopt it as expressing our own desires, and add our Amen to every petition contained in it.

"Come, Holy Ghost, our souls inspire,
And lighten with celestial fire!
Thou the anointing Spirit art,
Who dost thy seven-fold gifts impart;
Thy blessed unction from above
Is comfort, life, and fire of love.
Enable with perpetual light
The dulness of our blinded sight;
Anoint and cheer our soiled face
With the abundance of thy grace;
Keep far our foes, give peace at home!
Where thou art Guide, no ill can come.
Teach us to know the Father, Son,
And Thee, of both, to be but One;
That through the ages all along,
This may be our endless song,—
Praise to Thy eternal merit,
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit!"

In this devout hymn the agency of the Holy Spirit, as the one source of light, and peace, and holiness, is fully acknowledged, and earnestly sought as the necessary means of forming pastors after God's heart: and it is well entitled to the encomium which has been already so often mentioned, "They have well said all that they have spoken."

Passing over the remaining prayers, we conclude this part of our subject with observing, that no sooner is the imposition of hands finished, and the commission given to the candidates to preach the Gospel, than the newly ordained consecrate themselves to God at his table; and seal, as it were, their vows, by partaking of the body and blood of Christ; into whose service they have been just admitted, and whom they have sworn to serve with their whole hearts.

Thus far then "all is well said;" and if our hearts be in unison with our words, verily we shall have reason to bless God to all eternity. "O that there *were* in us such an heart!"

Glad should I be, if your time would admit of it,

to

to set forth at considerable length the benefits that would accrue from a conformity of heart in us to all that has been before stated: but the indulgence with which I have hitherto been favoured must not be abused. I shall therefore close the subject with only two reflections, illustrative of the wish contained in the text.

First, if such an heart were in us, *how happy should we be in our souls!* Men may be so thoughtless, as to cast off all concern about futurity, and to say, "I shall have peace, though I walk in the imagination of my heart." But, if once we begin to indulge any serious reflections, we cannot avoid thinking of our responsibility on account of the souls committed to our charge. *Then*, if we bring to mind that solemn declaration of God, that "the souls of our people shall be required at our hands," we must of necessity tremble for our state. The concerns of *our own* souls are of more weight than all other things in the world; and the thought of perishing under the weight of *our own* personal transgressions is inexpressibly awful: but the thought of perishing under the guilt of destroying *hundreds and thousands* of immortal souls, is so shocking, that it cannot be endured; if once admitted into the mind, it will fill us with consternation and terror; and the excuses which now appear so satisfactory to us, will vanish like smoke. We shall not then think it sufficient to have fulfilled our duties by proxy; since others can but perform their own duties; nor can any diligence of theirs ever justify our neglect: having sworn for ourselves, we must execute for ourselves; nor ever be satisfied with committing that trust to others, which at the bar of judgment we must give account of for ourselves. Nor shall we then think it sufficient to plead, that we have other engagements, which interfere with the discharge of our ministerial duties; unless we can be assured, that God will wave his claims upon us, and acknowledge the labours which we have undertaken for our temporal advantage, more important than those which respect his honour, and man's salvation. On the other hand, if we have the testimony of our own consciences,

consciences, that we have endeavoured faithfully to perform our Ordination vows, and to execute, though with much imperfection, the work assigned us, we shall lift up our heads with joy. Matter for deep humiliation, indeed, even the most laborious Ministers will find; but at the same time they will have an inward consciousness, that they have exerted themselves sincerely for God, though not so earnestly as they might: and, in the hope that the Saviour, whose love they have proclaimed to others, will have mercy upon them, they cast themselves on him for the acceptance of their services, and expect, through him, the salvation of their souls. Moreover, if we have been diligent in the discharge of our high office, we shall have a good hope that we have been instrumental to the salvation of others, whom we shall have as our joy and crown of rejoicing in the last day. With these prospects before us, we shall labour patiently, waiting, like the husbandman, for a distant harvest. Trials we shall have, of many kinds; and many, arising solely from our fidelity to God: but we shall bear up under them, going "through evil report and good report," till we have fought our fight, and finished our course: and then at last we shall be welcomed as faithful servants into the joyous presence of our Lord. Who would not wish for such happiness as this? Only then let our hearts experience what our lips have uttered, and that happiness is ours: only let our professions be verified, our promises fulfilled, and our prayers realized, and all will be well: God will see in us the heart which he approves, and will honour us with testimonies of his approbation to all eternity.

My second observation is, If there were in us such an heart, *what blessings would result to all around us!* The careless Minister may spend many years in a populous parish, and yet never see one sinner converted from the error of his ways, or turned unto God in newness of life. But the faithful servant of Jehovah will have some fruit of his ministry. God will answer to him that prayer at the close of the Ordination

Ordination Service, "Grant that Thy word, spoken by their mouths, may have such success, that it may never be spoken in vain!" God indeed does not make all equally useful; but he will leave none without witness, that the word which they preach is His Word, and that it is "the power of God unto the salvation of men." Behold, wherever such a Minister is fixed, what a change takes place in reference to religion! The obstinately wicked, who either hear him with prejudice or turn their backs on his ministry, may possibly be only more hardened by the means he uses for their conversion; and circumstances may arise, where those who would once have plucked out their own eyes for him, may become for awhile his enemies: but still there are many that will arise and call him blessed; many will acknowledge him as their spiritual father; many will bless God for him, and shew in their respective circles the happy effects of his ministry. They will love his person; they will enjoy his preaching; they will tread in his steps; and they will shine as lights in a dark world. What, then, might not be hoped for, if all who have undertaken the sacred office of the Ministry, fulfilled their engagements in the way we have before described? What if all *prayed* the prayers, instead of reading them; and laboured *out of the pulpit*, as well as in it; striving to bring all their people, "not only to the knowledge and love of Christ, but to such ripeness and perfectness of age in Christ, as to leave no room among them, either for error in religion, or for viciousness of life?" If there were such exertions made in every parish, we should hear no more complaints about the increase of Dissenters. The people's prejudices in general are in favour of the Establishment: and the more any persons have considered the excellence of the Liturgy, the more are they attached to the Established Church. Some indeed would entertain prejudices against it, even if all the twelve Apostles were members of it, and ministered in it: but, in general, it is a want of zeal in its Ministers, and not any want of purity in its

its institutions, that gives such an advantage to Dissenters. Let me not be misunderstood, as though by these observations I meant to suggest any thing disrespectful of the Dissenters; (for I honour all that love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity, of whatever Church they be; and I wish them, from my heart, every blessing that their souls can desire:) but, whilst I see such abundant means of edification in the Church of England, I cannot but regret that any occasion should be given to men to seek for that in other places, which is so richly provided for them in their own Church. Only let us be faithful to our engagements, and our churches will be crowded, our sacraments thronged, our hearers edified: good Institutions will be set on foot; liberality will be exercised, the poor benefited, the ignorant enlightened, the distressed comforted; yea, and our "wilderness world will rejoice and blossom as the rose." O that we might see this happy day; which, I would fondly hope, has begun to dawn! O that God would arise and "take to him his great power, and reign amongst us!" O that he might no longer have to express a wish, "that there *were* in us such an heart;" but rather have to rejoice over us as *possessed of* such an heart; and that he would magnify himself in us as instruments of good to a ruined world! The Apostle to the Hebrews represents all the saints of former ages as witnesses of the conduct of those who were then alive; and he urges it as an argument with them to exert themselves to the uttermost: "Having then," says he, "so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin that doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us." Thus let us consider the Reformers of our Church as now looking down upon us, and filled with anxiety for the success of their labours: let us hear them saying, "We did all that human foresight could do; we shewed to Ministers what they ought to be; we bound them by the most solemn ties to walk in the steps of Christ and his Apostles: if any shall be

lukewarm

lukewarm in their office, we shall have to appear in judgment against them, and shall be the means of aggravating their eternal condemnation." Let us, I say, consider them as spectators of our conduct; and endeavour to emulate their pious examples. Let us consider, likewise, that the Liturgy itself will appear against us in judgment, if we labour not to the utmost of our power to fulfil the engagements which we have voluntarily entered into: yea, God himself will say to us, "Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee, thou wicked servant." May God enable us all to lay these things to heart; that, whether we have already contracted, or are intending at a future period to contract, this fearful responsibility, we may duly consider what account we shall have to give of it in the day of judgment!

## CXXXVIII.

### THE REASONS OF GOD'S DIVERSIFIED DEALINGS WITH HIS PEOPLE.

Deut, viii. 2, 3. *And thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments or no. And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, (which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know,) that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live.*

AMONGST the various things which distinguish man from the brute creation, is that faculty which he possesses of grasping within his mind things past and future; and of deriving both from the one and the other the most powerful incentives to action. The consideration of things future is that which operates most upon the bulk of mankind: but men of thoughtful and comprehensive minds derive the most important lessons of wisdom from reflecting on the past: and it is this retrospective view of things which distinguishes one man from another, almost as

as much as a prospective view of them does an adult person from a child. Hence Moses was peculiarly solicitous to draw the attention of the Israelites to all those wonderful events which had taken place, from the period when he was first commissioned to effect their deliverance from Egypt, to that hour when they were about to enter into the promised land: and truly there never was such an eventful period from the foundation of the world, nor one so replete with instruction as that.

Two things in particular we notice in the words before us;

I. The diversified dealings of God with his people—

In the dealings of God with the Jews we see a mixture of mercy and of judgment. His mercies to them were such as never were vouchsafed to any other people. His interpositions by ten successive plagues in order to effect their deliverance from Egypt, their passage through the sea, their preservation from "serpents and scorpions in that great and terrible wilderness[a];" their miraculous supplies of manna from the clouds, and of "water from the rock of flint;" the preservation of "their garments and of their shoes[b] from waxing old during the space of forty years," and of "their feet also from swelling," notwithstanding the long journeys which at different times they were obliged to travel[c]; these, with innumerable other mercies not specified in the text, distinguished that people above every nation under heaven.

But at the same time God saw fit occasionally to let them feel the difficulties with which they were encompassed. He suffered them on some occasions to be tried both with hunger and thirst; and inflicted heavy chastisements upon them for their multiplied transgressions.

Now in this we have a glass wherein to see the dealings of God with his people in all ages:

1. His

[a] ver. 15. [b] ver. 4. with Deut. xxix. 5.
[c] Numb. ix. 21. with x. 33.

1. His mercies to every one of us have been innumerable—

[At our very first formation in the womb, the power and goodness of God towards us were exercised in imparting to us all our faculties both of body and mind. We have been preserved by him from innumerable dangers, both seen and unseen. In our national, domestic, and individual capacity, we have been highly privileged ——— And though the interference of God on our behalf has not been so *visible* as that which was vouchsafed to the Jews, it has not been at all less *real*. Our supplies of food, of raiment, and of health have been as much owing to the care of his providence, as if they had been given to us by miraculous interpositions—

The benefits of revelation too which we have enjoyed, have marked his special favour to our souls. In this respect we have been as much elevated above the heathen world as the Jews themselves were; or rather, still more elevated, in proportion to the clearer light which shines on us in the New Testament; which, in comparison of theirs, is as the meridian light to the early dawn ———

But what shall we say of those who have tasted of redeeming love, and experienced the transforming efficacy of the Gospel of Christ? What tongue can declare the mercies vouchsafed to them? ——— Yet,]

2. We have also been partakers of his judgments—

[All of us have found this to be a checquered scene: some have been tried in one way, and others in another; some for a longer, and others for a shorter period; some in mind ——— some in body ——— some in estate ——— Even those who have been most favoured in this respect, have found abundant reason to acknowledge, that "this is not our rest." To the young and inexperienced, the world appears a garden abounding with delights: but on a fuller acquaintance with it we find, that its roses have their thorns; and even its choicest delicacies often prove occasions of the sorest pain. "Man is born to trouble, as the sparks fly upward."]

As, from our general notions of God's goodness, we might have expected that his dealings with his people would have been different from what we find them to be, let us inquire into,

II. His end and design in them—

The reasons here assigned for his dispensations towards the Jews, will afford us a clue for discovering his intentions towards ourselves. He diversifies his dispensations towards us,

1. To

1. To humble us—

[Were our mercies altogether unmixed, we should know nothing of the effect of judgments on the rebellious will of man: and if there were no intermission of adversity, we should be strangers to the effect of prosperity upon the carnal heart: but by the variety of states which we pass through, we are led to see the total depravity of our nature; since we can be in no state whatever, wherein the mind does not shew itself alienated from God, and averse to bear his yoke. We are apt to think that a change of circumstances would produce in us a change of conduct: but, as a person in a fever finds no posture easy, nor any food pleasant to his taste, so we, through the corruption of our hearts, find all situations alike unproductive of a permanent change in our dispositions towards God. "We are bent to backslide from him, even as a broken bow;" and every change of situation only serves to establish that melancholy truth, that "the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked." To convince us of this is the first work of God upon the soul[d], and the first object of all his dispensations."]

2. To prove us—

[It is easy to obey God at some times and in some respects, in comparison of what it is at other times and in other respects. God therefore puts us into a variety of situations, to try whether we will make him the supreme object of our regard in all. At some times he gives health, and affluence, and honour, to see whether we will suffer these things to draw away our hearts from him, or whether we will improve them all for him. At other times he lays affliction upon our loins, to see whether we will retain our love to him, and bless him as well when he takes away as when he gives. At some times he permits us to be sorely tempted by Satan, and by the corrupt propensities of our own hearts, to prove whether we will prefer the maintenance of a good conscience to any of the gratifications of sense. At other times he permits persecution to rage against us, that it may appear whether we will sacrifice our interests, and life itself, for him. In fact, every change of circumstance is sent by him, precisely as the command respecting the sacrificing of Isaac was sent to Abraham: by that command "God tempted him;" and by every circumstance of life he tempts us, to "prove whether we will obey his commandments or no."

3. To instruct us—

[We are apt to imagine that the happiness of man is greatly dependent upon earthly prosperity; and that the loss of temporal comforts is an irreparable evil. But God would teach us, that this is altogether a mistake. By loading us with all that this world can give, he shews us how insufficient earthly things are to make us happy: and, by reducing us to a state of want, or pain,

[d] John xvi. 8.

pain, or trouble of any kind, he leads us to himself, and then shews us how happy he can make us, though under circumstances the most painful to flesh and blood. This is a great and valuable lesson; most honourable to him, most beneficial to us: it elevates us completely above this lower world; and, in proportion as it is learned, enables us to live on God alone. When Satan tempted our Lord to distrust his heavenly Father's care, and to "command the stones to be made bread," our Lord reminded him of the lesson which was here recorded for the good of the Church; namely, that it was the blessing of God upon bread, and not the bread itself, that could do us good; and that that blessing would as easily produce the effect without means as with them. Thus he teaches us that, in having God, we have ALL; and that, without him, we have *nothing*.]

4. To do us good at our latter end[e]—

[If our state were never diversified, we should have but one set of graces called forth into action: but, by experiencing alterations and reverses, we are led to exercise every kind of grace: and by this means we grow in every part, just as the members of the body grow, when all are duly exercised[f]. Moreover, according to the measure which we attain of the stature of Christ, will be the recompence of our reward: every grace we exercise, whether active or passive, will be noted in the book of God's remembrance, and "be found to our praise, and honour, and glory, at the appearing of Jesus Christ[g]:" the one as well as the other, though but weak and defective in itself, is "working out for us an exceeding and eternal weight of glory."]

APPLICATION—

1. Let us trace, every one of us, the dealings of God with us—

[A more instructive history we could not read, than that of the Lord's dealings with us from our earliest infancy to the present moment. If it were recorded with the minuteness and fidelity that the history of the Jews has been, we should see, that as face answers to face in a glass, so does our experience to theirs. We are apt to wonder at their wickedness; but we should cease to wonder at them, if we were thoroughly acquainted with ourselves. Our wonder would rather be at the patience and forbearance, the mercy and the kindness, of our God. Earnestly then would we recommend to every one to apply to himself the injunction in our text, "Thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God hath led thee these forty years in the wilderness:" and we may rest assured that such habits of reflection will bring their own reward along with them[h].]

2. Let

[e] ver. 16. [f] Col. ii. 19. 1 Pet. ii. 2. [g] 1 Pet. i. 7. [h] Ps. cvii. 43.

2. Let our experience of his past kindness lead us to confide in him in future—

[The way in which the Israelites were led was circuitous and dreary: yet we are told that God "led them by the *right* way." It may be that our way also has been such as has excited many murmurs, and great discouragement: but, if we have considered it to any good purpose, we shall acknowledge it to have been on the whole more profitable for us, than any that we should have chosen for ourselves. Perhaps we shall see cause to bless our God for some of our heaviest trials, more than for any of those things which administered to our pleasure. Convinced then by our past experience, we should be willing to leave matters to the disposal of our God; and to submit to any trials, which he sends for the promotion of our eternal welfare. Our only solicitude should be to make a due improvement of his dispensations: and if only we may humbled, instructed, sanctified, and exalted by them, we should cordially and continually say, "Let him do what seemeth him good."]

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## CXXXIX.

### THE REPLACING OF THE TWO TABLES OF THE COVENANT.

Deut. x. 1, 2. *At that time the Lord said unto me, Hew thee two tables of stone like unto the first, and come up unto me into the mount, and make thee an ark of wood: and I will write on the tables the words that were in the first tables which thou brakest, and thou shalt put them in the ark.*

THOSE to whom the modes of communication which are common in Eastern countries are but little known, feel a jealousy respecting every thing that is figurative and emblematical. But even in the New Testament there is much that is hidden under figures. The whole life of our blessed Saviour is justly considered as *an example:* but it is rarely considered that in all its principal events it was also *emblematical* of what is spiritually experienced in the heart of the Believer: the circumcision of Christ representing the circumcision of our hearts; the baptism, also, and the crucifixion, and the resurrection of Christ marking our death unto sin, and our new birth unto righteousness. If then in the New Testament, where

where truth is exhibited so plainly, there are many things revealed in shadows, we may well expect to find much that is figurative in the Old Testament, where the whole system of religion was veiled under types and figures. The circumstances before us, we do not hesitate to say, have a hidden meaning, which, when brought forth, will be highly instructive. But in exploring the mysteries that are hid under these shadows, there is need of the utmost sobriety, that we impose not on Scripture any other sense than that which God himself designed it to convey. However some may gratify themselves with exercising their ingenuity on the sacred writings, and please themselves with their own fanciful interpretations of God's blessed word, I dare not proceed in that unhallowed course: I would "put off my shoes, when I come upon this holy ground;" and be content to leave untouched what I do not understand, and what God has not enabled me to explain, with a good hope at least that I express only "the mind of his Spirit." With this reverential awe upon my mind, I will endeavour, as God shall help me, to set before you what I conceive to be contained in the passage which we have just read. In it we notice,

I. The breaking of the two tables of the law—

God, after he had published by an audible voice the law of the Ten Commandments, wrote them upon two tables of stone, and gave them to Moses upon Mount Horeb, that they might serve as a memorial of what all who entered into covenant with him were bound to perform. But when Moses, on descending from the mount, found that the whole people of Israel were worshipping the golden calf, he was filled with righteous indignation, and "brake the two tables in pieces before their eyes[a]." Now this action of his imported,

1. That the covenant which God had made with them was utterly dissolved—

[Repeatedly are the two tables called "the tables of the covenant[b];" because they contained the terms on which the Israelites

[a] Ch. ix. 10, 15, 16, 17. [b] ib. ver. 9, 11, 15.

Israelites were ultimately to find acceptance before God. But their idolatry was a direct violation of the very first precept of the decalogue, or rather an utter subversion of the whole: and as they had thus broken the covenant on their part, Moses by breaking the two tables declared it to be annulled on God's part. God now disclaimed all connexion with them; and by calling them "*thy* people," that is, Moses's people, he disowned them for *his*; and threatened to "blot out their name from under heaven." All this was intimated, I say, by Moses, in this significant action. A similar mode of expressing the same idea was adopted by Jehovah in the days of the prophet Zechariah. He took two staves, one to represent the tribes of Judah and Benjamin; and the other, the ten tribes. These he brake, the one after the other, in order to shew that as they were disjoined from each other, so they should henceforth be separated from him also, and that "his covenant with them" both was dissolved[c]. Thus far then, we apprehend, the import of this expressive action is clear.

The further light which I shall endeavour to throw upon it, though not so clear to a superficial observer, will to a well-instructed mind approve itself to be both just and important. It further imports then,

2. That that mode of covenanting with God was from that time for ever closed—

[This, I grant, does not at first sight appear; though it may be inferred from the very circumstance of *the same law* being afterwards given *in a different way*. This mode of conveying *such* instruction repeatedly occurs in the holy Scriptures. The prophet Jeremiah tells the Jews that God would "make a *new* covenant with them;" from whence St. Paul infers that the covenant under which they lived, was old, and "*ready to vanish away*[d]." The prophet Haggai speaks of God "shaking once more the heavens and the earth:" and this St. Paul interprets as an utter removal of the Jewish dispensation, that "the things which could not be shaken," the Christian dispensation, "might remain[e]." Now if these apparently incidental *words* conveyed so much, what must have been intended by that *action*, an action which, in point of singularity, yields not to any within the whole compass of the sacred records?

But is this view of the subject confirmed by any farther evidence? I answer, Yes; it is agreeable to the whole scope of the inspired volume. Throughout the New Testament we have this truth continually and most forcibly inculcated, that the law, having been once broken, can never justify: that, whilst under *it*, we are, and ever must be, under a curse: and therefore we must be dead to it, and renounce all hope of acceptance by it. And

[c] Zech. xi. 7, 10, 14. [d] Jer. xxxi. 31. with Heb. viii. 13.
[e] Hagg. ii. 6. with Heb. xii. 26, 27.

And the breaking of the tables before their eyes was in effect like the driving of our first parents out of Paradise, and the preventing of their return to it by the menaces of a flaming sword. The tree of life which was to them in their state of innocence a pledge of eternal life, was no longer such when they had fallen: and therefore God in mercy prohibited their access to it, in order that they might be shut up to that way of reconciliation which God had provided for them in the promised seed. And thus did Moses by this significant action cut off from the Jews all hope of return to God by that covenant which they had broken, and shut them up to that other, and better, covenant, which God was about to shadow forth to them.]

But the chief mystery lies in,

II. The manner in which they were replaced—

Moses, having by his intercession obtained forgiveness for the people, was ordered to prepare tables of stone similar to those which he had broken, and to carry them up to the mount, that God might write upon them with his own finger a fresh copy of the law. He was ordered also to make an ark, in which to deposit the tables when so inscribed. Now what was the scope and intent of these directions? Truly they were of pre-eminent importance, and were intended to convey the most valuable instruction. Mark,

1. The renewing of the tables which had been broken—

[This intimated that God was reconciled towards them, and was still willing to take them as his people, and to give himself to them as their God. The very first words of the Law thus given said to them, "I am the Lord thy God." So that on this part of the subject it is unnecessary to dwell.]

2. The putting of them, when so renewed, into an ark—

[Christ is that ark into which the law was put. To him it was committed, in order that he might fulfil it for us. He was made under the law for this express end[f]: and he has fulfilled it in all its parts; enduring all its penalties, and obeying all its precepts[g]. This he was appointed of God to do: the law was put into his heart on purpose that he might do it[h]: and having done it, he is "the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth[i]." Hence we are enabled to view the law without fear, and

[f] Gal. iv. 4, 5. [g] Gal. iii. 13, 14. Phil. ii. 8. [h] Ps. xl. 8.
[i] Rom. x. 4.

and to hear it without trembling. Now we can contemplate its utmost requirements, and see that it has been satisfied in its highest demands. We can now even found our hopes upon it; not as obeyed by us; but as obeyed by our surety and substitute, the Lord Jesus Christ; by whose obedience it has been more magnified than it has ever been dishonoured by our disobedience. It is no longer now a "ministration of death and condemnation[k]," but a source of life to those who plead the sacrifice and obedience of Jesus Christ. In this view the law itself, no less than the Prophets, bears testimony to Christ[l], and declares that, through his righteousness, God can be "a just God, and yet a Saviour[ll]," "just, and yet the justifier of all them that believe[m]." This is the great mystery which the angels so much admire, and which they are ever endeavouring to look into[mm].

If it appear strange that so much should be intimated in so small a matter, let us only consider what we know assuredly to have been intimated in an occurrence equally insignificant, which took place *at the very same time*. When Moses came down with *these* tables in his hand, his face shined so bright that the people were unable to approach him; and he was constrained to put a vail upon his face in order that they might have access to him to hear his instructions[n]. This denoted *their incapacity to comprehend the law, till Christ should come to remove the vail from their hearts*[o]. And precisely in the same manner the putting of the law into the ark denoted *the incapacity of man to receive it as it is in itself, and the necessity of viewing it only as fulfilled in Christ*. "Through the law" itself which denounces such curses[p], and "through the body of Christ" which sustained those curses[q], we must be dead to the law," and have no hope whatever towards God but in the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ[r], who, in consequence of obeying its precepts and enduring its penalties, is to be called by every child of man, "The Lord our Righteousness[r]."]

3. The preparing the tables on which the law was written—

[The first tables were prepared by God himself: but, when they were broken, and to be renewed, Moses was ordered to prepare the tables, and carry them up to the mount, that they might there have the law inscribed upon them by God himself. Commentators have suggested that this was intended to intimate, that though God alone could write the law on the heart, means were to be used for that end by people for themselves, and by Ministers

[k] 2 Cor. iii. 7, 9. [l] Rom. iii. 21, 22. [ll] Isai. xlv. 21.
[m] Rom. iii. 26.
[mm] Carefully compare Exod. xxv. 17—20. with 1 Pet. i. 12.
[n] Exod. xxxiv. 29—35.
[o] 2 Cor. iii. 13—16. [p] Gal. ii. 19. [q] Rom. vii. 4.
[r] Gal. ii. 15, 16. Phil. iii. 9.

sters in their behalf. But I rather gather from it a deeper and more important lesson, namely, that notwithstanding the law was fulfilled for us by Christ, we must seek to have it inscribed on our stony hearts; and that, if we go up with them to the mount of God from time to time for that end, God will write his law there. I the rather believe this to be the true meaning, because our *deadness to* the law *as a covenant of works* is continually associated with *a delight in it as a rule of life*[s]; and because the writing of the law upon our hearts is the great distinguishing promise of the New Covenant[t]. In this view the direction respecting the tables is very instructive, seeing that it unites what can never be separated, a "hope in Christ" as the only Saviour of the world, and a "purifying of the heart as he is pure[u]."]

IMPROVEMENT—

1. Let us be thankful that the law is given to us in this mitigated form—

[The law is the same as ever: not a jot or tittle of it was altered, or ever can be: it is as immutable as God himself[x]. But as given on Mount Sinaï, it was "a fiery law;" and so terrible, that the people could not endure it; and "even Moses himself said, I exceedingly fear and quake[y]." But in the ark, Christ Jesus, its terrors are abated: yea, to those who believe in him, it has no terror at all: its demands are satisfied in their behalf, and its penalties sustained: and, *on it, as fulfilled in him* they found their claims of everlasting life[z]. It must never be forgotten, that *the mercy-seat was of the same dimensions with the ark;* and *to all who are in Christ Jesus does the mercy of God extend*[a]. If we look to the law as fulfilled in and by the Lord Jesus Christ, we have nothing to fear: "we are no longer under the law, but under grace[b]:" and "there is no condemnation to us[c]." "Only let us rely on him as having effected every thing for us[d], and all that he possesses shall be ours[e]."]

2. Let us seek to have it visibly written upon our hearts—

[None but God can write it there: our stony hearts are harder than adamant. Nevertheless, if we go up to God in the holy mount, "he will take away from us the heart of stone, and give us a heart of flesh[f];" and then "on the fleshly tables of

[s] See Gal. ii. 19. & Rom. vii. 4. before cited.
[t] Jer. xxxi. 31—33. with Heb. viii. 8—10.
[u] 1 John iii. 3. [x] Matt. v. 17, 18. [y] Heb. xii. 19—21.
[z] Isai. xlv. 24, v. 22. [a] Exod. xxv. 10, 21, 22. Mark the promise in
[b] Rom. vi. 14. [c] Rom. viii. 1.
[d] ib. ver. 34. [e] 1 Cor. iii. 21—23. [f] Ezek. xxxvi. 26.

of our heart" will he write his perfect law[g]. O blessed privilege! Beloved Brethren, let us covet it, and seek it night and day. Only think, what a change will take place in you when this is wrought! What a lustre will be diffused over your very countenance[h]! Yes verily, all who then behold you shall "take knowledge of you that you have been with Jesus," and "confess, that God is with you of a truth." Despair not, any of you: though ye have turned from God to the basest idolatry, yet has your great Advocate and Intercessor prevailed for you to remove the curses of the broken law, and to restore you to the favour of your offended God. Bring me up, says God, your hearts of stone, and I will so inscribe my law upon them, that "ye shall never more depart from me, nor will I ever more depart from you[i]." Brethren, obey the call without delay: lose not a single hour. Hasten into the presence of your God; and there abide with him, till he has granted your request. So shall "ye be God's people, and he shall be your God, for ever and ever[k]."]

[g] 2 Cor. iii. 2, 3. [h] Exod. xxxiv. 29, 30. [i] Jer. xxxii. 38—41. [k] ib.

## CXL.

### THE ELECTING LOVE OF GOD AN INCENTIVE TO HOLINESS.

Deut. x. 14—16. *Behold, the heaven and the heaven of heavens is the Lord's thy God, the earth also with all that therein is. Only the Lord had a delight in thy fathers to love them; and he chose their seed after them, even you above all people, as it is this day. Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no more stiff-necked.*

THE true tendency of religion is marked in the words preceding our text. Under the Christian, no less than under the Jewish dispensation, it is altogether practical; so that in every age of the Church we may adopt that appeal of Moses, "And now, Israel, what doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but to fear the Lord thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, to keep the commandments of the Lord, and his statutes, which I command thee this day for thy good?" But we must not in our zeal for morals overlook those principles which alone have efficacy to produce them. The principles which call forth our hopes and our fears, have

have necessarily a powerful effect on our conduct: but a more refined operation is derived from those principles which excite our love and gratitude. The electing love of God, for instance, when brought home with a personal application to the soul, has a constraining influence, which nothing can resist. Hence Moses so often reminds the Israelites of their peculiar obligations to God, such as no other people from the beginning of the world could ever boast of: and takes occasion from those distinguishing favours to urge them the more powerfully to devote themselves to his service. What he considered as their duty we have already noticed: his mode of urging them to perform it comes now to be more particularly considered: "The Lord had a delight in thy fathers, &c.: circumcise *therefore*, &c."

From these words we shall shew,

I. That God's people are brought into that relation to him, not by any merits of their own, but solely in consequence of his electing love—

The whole universe, both "the heavens and the earth," is the Lord's: it owes its existence to his all-creating power; and it is altogether at his disposal. He has the same power over it as the potter has over the clay: and, if it had pleased him to mar, or to annihilate, any part of the creation, as soon as he had formed it, he had a right to do so.

But, whilst he has the same right over all his intelligent creatures, he has seen fit to bring some, and some only, into a nearer connexion with himself.

Into this state he brings them of his own sovereign will and pleasure—

[Abraham was an idolater, as all his family were, when God first called him by his grace; nor had he any more claim to the blessings promised him, than any other person whatsoever. Isaac was appointed to be the channel of these blessings in preference to Ishmael, long before he was born into the world: and Jacob also the younger was chosen before Esau the elder, "even whilst they were both yet in the womb, and consequently had done neither good nor evil." His posterity too was chosen to inherit the promised blessings. And why were they chosen? Was it for their superior goodness either seen or foreseen? It could

could not be for any thing seen; for they were yet unborn when the blessings were promised to them: and it could not be for any thing foreseen, for they proved a rebellious and stiff-necked people from the very first[a]. The selection of them can be traced to nothing but to God's sovereign will and pleasure[b].

In every age he has done the same. Those who love and serve God have always been a remnant only: but they have been "a remnant according to the election of grace." All true believers at this day, as well as in the Apostolic age, must acknowledge, that "God has called them, not according to their works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given them in Christ Jesus before the world began[c]." It is "to the good pleasure of his will," and not to any thing in themselves, that they must ascribe the gift of their spiritual privileges, and spiritual attainments. No one of them can say, that he "made himself to differ," or that he possesses "any thing which he has not received." All that even the most eminent saints possess is a free unmerited gift from God.]

Moreover, in this exercise of his sovereign will and pleasure, he gives no just occasion of complaint to any—

[This exercise of his sovereignty is condemned by many, as being an act of injustice; since to choose some and to leave others gives to the chosen a preference which they do not deserve. But it must be remembered, that none had any claim upon God: and, if we had all been left, like the fallen angels, to endure the full consequences of our transgression, God would still have been holy and just and good: and, if for his own glory he has decreed to rescue any from destruction, he does no injury to any, nor is accountable to any for this display of his grace.

I well know that this doctrine is controverted by many. But the very persons who deny the doctrine of election, as applied to individuals, are constrained to acknowledge it in reference to nations. But where is the difference? if it is unjust in the one case, it is unjust in the other: if it is unjust to elect any to salvation, it is unjust to elect them to the means of salvation; those from whom he withholds the means, have the same ground of complaint as those from whom he withholds the end. It is nothing to say, that the injury is *less* in the one case than in the other: for if it be injurious at all, God would never have done it: but if it be not injurious at all, then does all opposition to the doctrine fall to the ground. The principle must be conceded or denied altogether. Denied it cannot be, because it is an unquestionable fact that God has exercised his sovereignty, and does still exercise it, in instances without number: and, if it be conceded,

[a] Deut. ix. 13, 24. [b] Deut. vii. 6—8. [c] 2 Tim. i. 9.

ceded, then is the objector silenced; and he must admit that God has a right to do what he will with his own.

Perhaps it may be said that election is, and has always been, conditional. But this is not true. As far as related to the possession of Canaan, the election of the Jews might be said to be conditional: but on what conditions was the election of Abraham, or of Isaac, or of Jacob suspended? On what was the election of their posterity to the means of salvation suspended? On what conditions has God chosen us to enjoy the sound of the Gospel, in preference to millions of heathens, who have never been blessed with the light of revelation? The truth is, we know nothing of the doctrines of grace but as God has revealed them: and his choice of some to salvation now stands on the very same authority as his choice of others to the means of salvation in the days of old. If such an exercise of sovereignty was wrong then, it is wrong now: if it was right then, it is right now: and if it was right in respect to nations, it cannot be wrong in reference to individuals. The same principle which vindicates or condemns it in the one case, must hold good in the other also. The extent of the benefits conferred cannot change the nature of the act that confers them: it may cause *the measure* of good or evil that is in the act to vary: but *the intrinsic quality* of the act must in either case remain the same.]

That this doctrine may not appear injurious to morality, I proceed to observe,

II. That the circumstance of God's exercising this sovereignty is so far from weakening our obligation to good works, that it binds us the more strongly to the performance of them. Moses says, "God has chosen you;" "circumcise *therefore* the foreskin of your hearts." Here observe,

1. The duty enjoined—

[We are all by nature a rebellious and stiff-necked people. We wonder at the conduct of the Israelites in the wilderness: but in that we may see a perfect image of our own: we have not been obedient to God's revealed will. We have been alike rebellious, whether loaded with mercies, or visited with judgments. Light and easy as the yoke of Christ is, we have not taken it upon us, but have lived to the flesh and not to the Spirit, to ourselves, and not unto our God. But we must no longer proceed in this impious career: it is high time that we cast away the weapons of our rebellion, and humble ourselves before God. We must "be no more stiff-necked," but humble, penitent, obedient. Nor is it an outward obedience only that we must render to our God; we must

must "circumcise the foreskin of our hearts," mortifying every corrupt propensity, and "crucifying the flesh with the affections and lusts." It must not be grievous to us to part with sin, however painful may be the act of cutting it off: we must cut off a right hand, and pluck out a right eye, and retain nothing that is displeasing to our God. There is no measure of holiness with which we should be satisfied: we should seek to "be pure even as Christ himself is pure," and to "stand perfect and complete in all the will of God."]

2. The motive to the performance of it—

[To this duty the Jews are urged by the consideration of God's electing love, and of the distinguishing favours which he of his own sovereign grace and mercy had vouchsafed unto them.

And what more powerful motive could Moses urge than this? It was not to make them happy in a way of sin that God had chosen them, but to make them "a holy nation, a peculiar people, zealous of good works:" and, if they did not follow after universal holiness, they would counteract the designs of his providence and grace. They would deprive themselves also of the blessings provided for them. For it was only in the way of obedience that God could ever finally accept them. And thus it is with us also: we are "chosen unto good works, which God has before ordained that we should walk in them:" and it is only "by a patient continuance in well-doing that we can ever attain eternal life." We are "chosen to salvation," it is true; but it is "through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth:" and it is in that way only that we can ever attain the end.

But there is another view in which the consideration of God's electing love should operate powerfully on our hearts to the production of universal holiness; namely, by filling our souls with lively gratitude to him, and an ardent desire to requite him in the way that he himself directs. There is nothing under heaven that can constrain a pious soul like a sense of redeeming love. Let any one that has been "brought out of darkness into the marvellous light of the Gospel, and been turned from the power of Satan unto God," look around him, and see how many, not of heathens only, but of professed Christians also, are yet in the darkness of nature and the bonds of sin; and then let him recollect who it is that has made him to differ both from them and from his former self; and will not that make him cry out, "What shall I render to the Lord for all the benefits he has done unto me?" Yes, that view of his obligations to God will so inflame and penetrate his soul, that its utmost energies will from thenceforth be employed in honouring his adorable Benefactor.

This we say is the true and proper tendency of the doctrine in our text. The Jews, if they had justly appreciated the favours vouchsafed to them, would have been the holiest of all people upon

upon earth: and so will Christians be, if once they be sensible of the obligations conferred upon them by God's electing and redeeming love.]

IMPROVEMENT—

1. Let those who are zealous about duties, not be forgetful of their obligations—

[It is frequently found that persons altogether hostile to all the doctrines of grace, profess a great regard for the interests of morality. I stop not at present to inquire how far their professions are realized in practice: all I intend, is, simply to suggest, that high and holy affections are necessary to all acceptable obedience; and that those affections can only be excited in us by a sense of our obligations to God. If we attempt to lessen those obligations, we weaken and paralyse our own exertions. If we have been forgiven much, we shall love much: if we have received much, we shall return the more. If then it be only for the sake of that morality about which you profess so much concern, we would say to the moralist, Search into the mysteries of sovereign grace, and of redeeming love. If without the knowledge of them you may *walk* to a certain degree uprightly, you can never *soar* into the regions of love and peace and joy: your obedience will be rather that of a servant, than a son; and you will never acquire that delight in God, which is the duty and privilege of the believing soul.]

2. Let those who boast of their obligations to God not be inattentive to their duties—

[They who "cry, Lord, Lord, and neglect to do the things which he commands," miserably deceive their own souls. And it must be confessed that such self-deceivers do exist, and ever have existed in the Church of God. But let those who glory in the deeper *doctrines* of religion bear in mind, that nothing can supersede an observance of its *duties*: for "He is not a Jew who is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh: but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God[d]." That is a solemn admonition which God has given to us all: "Circumcise yourselves unto the Lord, and take away the foreskins of your heart, ye men of Judah, and inhabitants of Jerusalem, lest my fury come forth like fire, and burn that none can quench it[e]." It is not by our professions, but by our practice, that we shall be judged in the last day. We may say to our Lord in the last day, that we have not only gloried in him, but "in his name done many wonderful works;" yet will he say to us, "Depart from me, I never knew you," if we shall then be found to

[d] Rom. ii. 28, 29. [e] Jer. iv. 4.

to have been workers of iniquity. To all then who account themselves the elect of God, I say, Let the truth of your principles be seen in the excellence of your works: and, as you profess to be more indebted to God than others, let the heavenliness of your minds and the holiness of your lives be proportionably sublime and manifest: for it is in this way only that you can approve yourselves to God, or justify your professions in the sight of man].

## CXLI.

### THE GREAT ALTERNATIVE.

Deut. xi. 26—28. *Behold I set before you this day a blessing and a curse; a blessing, if ye obey the commandments of the Lord your God, which I command you this day; and a curse, if ye will not obey the commandments of the Lord your God.*

ON whatever occasion these words had been spoken, they must have appeared most weighty, and most important: but, as the parting address of Moses to the whole nation of Israel, when he was about to be withdrawn from them, they have a force and emphasis that can scarcely be exceeded. Imagine the aged servant of Jehovah, who, forty years before, had delivered to their fathers the law written with the finger of God, and who had lived to see the utter extinction of that rebellious generation for their transgressions against it; imagine him, I say, now affectionately warning this new generation, with all the solicitude of a father, and all the fidelity of one who was about to give up an immediate account of his stewardship. In this view, the words inspire us with solemn awe, and impress us with the fearful sense of our responsibility to God. May God accompany them with a divine energy to our souls, whilst we consider,

I. The awful alternative proposed to us—

As addressed to the Jews, these words may be understood as containing the terms of their national covenant, in which the blessings promised them depended on their obedience to the divine commands. But if we enter fully into the subject, we shall find it

it replete with instruction to us also, especially as exhibiting to our view the Christian covenant. Let us consider,

1. The fuller explanation which Moses himself gave of this alternative—

[The blessing and the curse are more fully stated in the 27th and 28th chapters of this book. But to what is the blessing annexed? to an unreserved obedience to *all* God's commandments[a]. And against what is the curse denounced? not only against some particular and more flagrant transgressions[b], but against any single deviation from the law of God, however small, however inadvertent[c]: and all the people were required to give their consent to these terms, acknowledging the justice of them, and professing their willingness to be dealt with according to them[d]. Now, I ask, who could obtain salvation on such terms as these? who could even venture to indulge a hope of ultimate acceptance with his God? It is obvious, that according to these terms the whole human race must perish. But was this the design of God in publishing such a covenant? Did he intend to mock his creatures with offers of mercy on terms which it was impossible to perform, and then to require of them a public acknowledgment of their approbation of them? No: he intended at this very time to shew them their need of a better covenant, and, in reality, to point out that very covenant for their acceptance. He intended to shew them, that, however in their national capacity they might secure a continuance of his favour by an observance of his commands, they could never attain eternal blessedness in such a way: they must look to their Messiah for the removal of the curses, which, according to their own acknowledgment, they merited; and obtain through him those blessings, which they would in vain attempt to earn by any merits of their own.

That this is the true scope of those chapters, will appear from the light thrown upon them by St. Paul; who quotes the very words of Moses which we have been considering, and declares, that, according to them, every human being is under a curse, and is therefore necessitated to look to Christ who became a "curse" for us, and to expect a "blessing" through him alone[e].

But this will receive additional light by considering,]

2. The peculiar circumstances attending the publication of it—

[It was particularly commanded by Moses, that as soon as that portion of the promised land on which Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim stood should be subdued, an altar of whole stones

[a] Deut. xxviii. 1. [b] Deut. xxvii. 15—25. [c] ib. ver. 26. [d] ib.
[e] Gal. iii. 10, 13, 14.

stones should be erected to the Lord; that it should be plastered over; that the law should be written in very large and legible characters upon it; that burnt-offerings and peace-offerings should be offered upon it; that the terms of the covenant should be recited in the hearing of all the people; that the blessings should be pronounced on Mount Gerizim, and the curses on Mount Ebal; and that all the people should give their public assent to the whole and every part of that covenant[f].

Now, whilst this command was a pledge to the people of their future success, it was an intimation to them, that the work of covenanting with God should take precedence of every other; and that, whatever were their occupations, whatever their difficulties, they must on no account forget to serve and honour God. Accordingly, as soon as Joshua had conquered Jericho and Ai, and had obtained possession of that spot of ground, notwithstanding he was surrounded by enemies on every side, he convoked the people, and complied with the divine command in every respect: "there was not a word of all that Moses commanded, which Joshua read not before all the congregation of Israel[g]."

But wherefore were these burnt-offerings to be offered on the occasion? and how could the people "eat their peace-offerings there, and rejoice before the Lord[gg]?" Methinks, if they were ratifying a covenant by which they could never obtain a blessing, and by which they must perish under a curse, there was little reason to "*rejoice.*" But these burnt-offerings were to direct their attention to the great sacrifice, by which all their curses should be removed, and all the blessings of salvation be secured to them. In the view of that great sacrifice, they might hear all the curses published, and feel no cause of dread or apprehension: in the view of that sacrifice, they might contemplate the imperfections of their obedience without despondency; yea, they might "eat their peace-offerings" in token of their acceptance with God, and might "rejoice in him with joy unspeakable and glorified." By this sacrifice they were taught, not to confine their views to the law, but to extend them to the Gospel: and, in the terms to which they assented, they were taught to include *obedience to the Gospel*[h], even to that great "commandment of God, which enjoins us to believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ[hh]." To this *we* also may assent; yea, to this we *must* assent: and we now set before you the blessing and the curse; we now propose to you the great alternative: If ye will obey the commandments of the Lord, believing in his only dear Son as the only ground of your hopes, and, from a sense of love to him, endeavouring unreservedly to fulfil his will, we promise you, in the name of Almighty God, a fulness of all spiritual and eternal blessings:

[f] Deut. xxvii. 2—8. [g] Josh. viii. 30—35. [gg] Deut. xxvii. 2—8.
[h] 2 Thess. i. 8. [hh] John vi. 29. & 1 John iii. 23.

blessings: but, if ye will not *thus* obey his commandments, we declare to you, that the curse of God shall rest upon your souls in time and in eternity.]

Such being the alternative proposed to us, we would set before you,

II. Some reflections arising from it:—

We cannot but notice from hence,

1. That Ministers must faithfully execute their high office—

[It was not from a want of tenderness that Moses thus faithfully declared the whole counsel of God, but because his duty to God, and to the people also, constrained him to declare it; and there is something peculiarly instructive in the directions he gave respecting the delivery of the blessing and the curse from the two contiguous mounts. Six of the tribes were to be stationed on the one mount, and six on the other: those who were born of the free-women, were to be on Mount Gerizim; and those who were of the bond-women, together with Reuben, who had been degraded, and Zebulon, the youngest of Leah's children, (to make the numbers equal) were to be on Mount Ebal, from whence the curses were to proceed. The tribe of Levi then were, where we should expect to find them, on the side from whence the blessings were pronounced[i]. This shewed, that, whilst the liberty of the Gospel led to true blessedness, it was the true end and scope of the Ministry to make men blessed[j]: *that* is the delightful employment of the sons of Levi: the highest character of a pious Minister is, to be "a helper of your joy." But it was ordered that some of the Levites should also be stationed on Mount Ebal to pronounce the curses[k]; because, however painful it may be to Ministers to exhibit the terrors of the law, the necessities of men require it, and the duties of their office demand it. Let us not then be thought harsh, if on proper occasions we make known to you the dangers of disobedience: "a necessity is imposed upon us; and woe be to us if we decline" executing the commission we have received. We must "*warn* every man, as well as *teach* every man, if we would present every man perfect in Christ Jesus[l]." It would be a more pleasing task to dwell only on the brighter side, and to speak to you only from Mount Gerizim; but we must occasionally stand also on Mount Ebal, and make you to hear the more awful part of the alternative which we are commissioned to propose. The message which we must deliver to every creature that is under heaven, consists of these two parts, "He that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved; and he that believeth not, shall be damned."]

2. That

[i] Deut. xxvii. 11—13. [j] Deut. x. 8. [k] Deut. xxvii. 14, 15. [l] Col. i. 28.

2. That faith and works are equally necessary to our salvation, though on different grounds—

[God forbid that for one moment we should attempt to lessen the importance and necessity of good works: they are indispensably necessary to our salvation: they are as necessary under the Gospel, as under the law: the only difference is, that, according to the strict tenor of the law, they were the ground of our hope; whereas, under the Gospel, they are the fruits and evidences of our faith. To found our hopes of salvation on our obedience to the holy law of God, would, as we have before seen, cut off all possibility of salvation; because our obedience must be *perfect*, in order to secure the promised "blessing;" and *every* act of disobedience has entailed on us an everlasting "curse:" but, if we comprehend, in our views of obedience, an obedience to the Gospel; if we comprehend in it the trusting in Christ for salvation, and the free endeavours of the soul to serve and honour him; then we may adopt the words of our text, and address them confidently to every living man. But then we must not forget, that it is the atoning sacrifice of Christ that alone enables us to hear even such a proposal with any degree of comfort. We can no more yield a *perfect* obedience to the Gospel, than we could to the law: our faith is imperfect, as well as our works: but, if we seek reconciliation with God through the death of his Son, we shall have peace with him, and may eat our peace-offering with confidence and joy. In our views of this subject, we need only set before our eyes that solemn transaction, to which we have referred: we shall there see, on what all the hopes of Israel were founded, namely, the sacrifice of Christ: we shall see at the same time, to what all Israel were bound, namely, a life of holy and unreserved obedience. It is precisely thus with ourselves; our obedience does not supersede the necessity of faith; nor does our faith set aside the necessity of obedience: one is the root, and the other is the fruit; one is the foundation, the other is the superstructure; one is the means of acceptance with God, the other is the means of honouring him and of adorning our holy profession.]

3. That happiness or misery is the fruit of our own choice—

[The very proposal of an alternative implies a choice: but this choice is yet intimated in a subsequent passage to the same effect[m]: nor can there be any doubt but that every man is called to make his election; and that his eternal state is fixed agreeably to the choice he makes. Not that we mean to set aside the election of God; for we know full well, that God's people are "a remnant according to the election of grace[n];" and that "it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that

[m] Deut. xxx. 15, 19. [n] Rom. xi. 5.

that sheweth mercy[o]." Nevertheless, no man is brought to heaven against his own will. He has felt the attractive influences of divine grace, and has been "made willing in the day of God's power[p]." He is drawn indeed, but it is "with the cords of a man, and with the bands of love." On the other hand, no man is sentenced to misery, who has not first chosen the ways of sin. He perishes, not because God has "ordained him to wrath[q]," but because "he will not come to Christ that he may have life[r]." Christ would gladly have "gathered him, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, but *he* would not."

It may be said perhaps, that, whilst we thus attempt to vindicate the justice of God, we countenance the workings of pride in man. But we have no fear that any one who has been drawn by the Spirit of God, will ever ascribe his conversion to the operations of his own natural will: he will readily own, that "it is God, who of his own good pleasure has given him both to will and to do[s];" and that it is "by the grace of God he is, what he is." On the other hand, all excuse is cut off from the ungodly: they must ever take the whole blame of their condemnation to themselves, and never presume to cast the least atom of it upon God.

Make ye then your choice, beloved Brethren: we this day set before you life and death, a blessing and a curse: choose ye therefore life, that your souls may live. God has declared that "he willeth not the death of any sinner: therefore turn yourselves, and live ye[t]." In his sacred name I promise to the righteous, that "it shall be well with him; but I denounce a woe unto the wicked, for it shall be ill with him, and the reward of his hands shall be given to him[u]."]

[o] Rom. ix. 15, 16. [p] Ps. cx. 3. [q] 1 Thess. v. 9.
[r] John v. 40. [s] Phil. ii. 13.
[t] Ezek. xviii. 32. & xxxiii. 11. [u] Isai. iii. 10, 11.

## CXLII.

### THE PROHIBITION OF EATING BLOOD.

Deut. xii. 23—25. *Only be sure that thou eat not the blood: for the blood is the life; and thou mayest not eat the life with the flesh: thou shalt not eat it; thou shalt pour it upon the earth as water: thou shalt not eat it, that it may go well with thee, and with thy children after thee, when thou shalt do that which is right in the sight of the Lord.*

THERE are many injunctions in the Mosaic law, which appear to have been given with more solemnity than their comparative importance demands: nor

nor can we account for the stress laid upon them, but by supposing them to have had a typical reference. What is here said, for instance, respecting the eating of blood, if we consider it as intended only to give an oblique hint of the duties of humanity and self-denial, is delivered in a far more emphatical manner than we should expect such an intimation to be given: for though a plain precept relating to them might fitly be enjoined in the strongest terms, and enforced by the strongest sanctions, it is not to be conceived that the image by which they would be shadowed forth, should be made to assume such an important aspect. If we mark the force and energy with which the prohibition of eating blood is here repeated, we shall be well persuaded that it contains some deeper mystery, which demands our most attentive consideration. But as, from the strength of the expressions, we may be ready to imagine that it is still binding upon *us*, we feel it necessary to guard against that mistake; and shall therefore consider,

I. The prohibition given—

*The manner in which it was given*, must by no means be overlooked—

[There is not in all the sacred volume any prohibition or command delivered more *peremptorily* than this. Four times it is repeated even in the short space of our text, "Thou mayest not eat of it; Thou shalt not eat of it; Be sure thou eat not of it." The *frequency* too with which it is received in the Scriptures is truly astonishing. When first the use of animals for food was permitted to Noah, the grant was accompanied with this restriction, "But flesh with the life thereof, which is the blood thereof, shall ye not eat[a]." By Moses the restriction is repeated again, and again[b]. The *sanctions with which it is enforced* are also peculiarly awful. Not only was the prosperity of the people suspended on their obedience to this command[c], but they were threatened with the most tremendous vengeance, if they should presume to violate it: "I will set my face against that soul that eateth blood, and will cut him off from among his people[d]." Even if they took in hunting or caught by any means a beast or fowl, they must "pour its blood upon the earth as water, and cover

[a] Gen. ix. 3, 4.
[b] Lev. iii. 16, 17. & vii. 26, 27. Deut. xv. 23. and several other places.
[c] See the text. [d] Read attentively Lev. xvii. 10—14.

*cover it with dust*[e]:" and all these injunctions must be *observed by all*, by strangers and sojourners as well as natives. Now I ask, Would this prohibition have been so *peremptorily*[f] *given*, so *frequently repeated*, so *solemnly enforced*; would *such particular directions have been added*; and would they have been made so *universally binding*, if there had been nothing mysterious in this appointment? We may be sure that]

*The grounds of it* are deserving of the deepest investigation—

[We speak not of such grounds as might *probably* exist, such as those before referred to, namely, the promotion of humanity and self-denial, (though in both these views the prohibition may be considered as highly instructive;) but of those grounds which we *know assuredly* to have been the principal, if not the only, object of the institution.

We must remember, that offerings were by the divine appointment presented from time to time as an atonement for sin; that the blood of those offerings being, as it were, the life of the animals, was considered as exclusively prevailing for the remission of sins; and that on that very account it was poured out upon the altar, in token, that it was presented to God as an expiation for iniquity, and was accepted by him instead of the life of the offender.

We must remember also, that all these offerings had respect to the sacrifice of Christ, which was in due time to be offered for the sins of the whole world.

Now it was of infinite importance that the highest possible veneration should be instilled into the minds of men for the offerings which they presented to God; and that they should be deeply impressed with a consciousness of their mysterious reference to the sacrifice of Christ. But, if they had been permitted to eat of blood, this reverence would have quickly abated: whereas by the strictness of the prohibition, it was kept alive in their minds: and even their common meals were rendered an occasion of bringing to their recollection the use of blood in their offerings, and the efficacy of that blood which was at a future period to be poured out upon the cross.

Here then was a reason for the prohibition; a reason, which accounts at once for the strictness, the frequency, the vehemence, with which it was given, and for the tremendous sanctions with which it was enforced. Nothing could be unimportant that had such a reference: and the more insignificant the prohibited thing was in itself, the more need there was that all possible weight should be given to it by the manner of its prohibition.]

But we shall not have a complete view of the subject, unless we consider,

II. The

[e] ib. [f] ib.

II. The prohibition reversed—

It is reversed, as it relates to the use of blood—

[To the first converts indeed it was enjoined, that they should abstain from the use of blood[g], no less than from fornication itself: and hence it has been supposed that there was a moral evil in the one, as well as in the other; and that, consequently, the prohibition still equally exists against both. But this is by no means the case. There was a necessity at that time to prohibit fornication, because the Gentile converts, who had been habituated from their youth to regard it as allowable, and in some instances even to practise it in their idolatrous worship, were still in a great measure insensible of its moral turpitude. *They* therefore needed to be more clearly informed respecting that sin, and to be cautioned against it: whilst *we*, having been educated with clearer views and better habits, are well aware of the sinfulness of such a practice. There was also a need to prohibit the eating of blood, because the Jews, who had been accustomed to regard the use of it with such abhorrence, would have been greatly offended when they saw Christians taking so great a liberty in direct opposition to what they considered as the law of God. On this account it was thought right to continue the prohibition for a time, that they might not shock the prejudices of the Jewish nation. But St. Paul assures us repeatedly that another part of this same prohibition was revoked; and declares that the circumstance of meat having been offered unto idols does not render it unfit for a Christian's use, provided he see the liberty into which the Gospel has brought him[h]. In like manner he declares, that "there is nothing unclean of itself," but that "to the pure all things are pure[i]." Hence we are sure, that the prohibition in our text is reversed.]

It is reversed also in a far higher sense—

[The real intent of the offerings under the Old Testament is abundantly declared in the New: and the blood of Christ which was once shed on Calvary for the remission of sins, is uniformly represented as the great Antitype to which all the types referred. Now it is true, that that *material* blood cannot be drunk by us: but *in a spiritual sense* it may. Do I say, It *may*? I must add, It *must*: we are *required* to drink it: and the command is enforced with sanctions still more solemn than those by which the prohibition in our text was enforced. Let us attend to the words of Christ himself: "Except ye eat the flesh of Christ and *drink his blood*, ye have no life in you. He that eateth my flesh and *drinketh my blood*, hath eternal life: for my flesh is meat indeed, and *my blood is drink* indeed[k]." Here

[g] Acts xv. 20, 29.
[h] 1 Cor. viii. 4, 8.
[i] Rom. xiv. 14, 20. 1 Tim. iv. 4, 5.
[k] John vi. 53—55.

Here the command is as universal, as, before, the prohibition was. Need we to explain this to any of you? We would hope, there are few so ignorant as not to know what was designed by our blessed Lord: he meant, that, as he was about to give himself as an offering and a sacrifice for sin, we must all *believe in him* as the only Saviour of the world, and *apply to ourselves* all the benefits of his atonement.

But lest this injunction of his should be forgotten, he actually instituted an ordinance, wherein he appointed wine to be drunk in remembrance of his blood, and expressly said of the cup, when he put it into the hands of his Disciples, "This is my blood which is shed for many for the remission of sins; drink *ye all* of this[l]." And St. Paul explaining the reason of this ordinance, observes, that it was instituted in order that we might "shew forth the Lord's death, till he come[m]." Here then we see that the prohibition under the Old Testament, and the command under the New, have one and the same object: the prohibition was to call the attention of men to the death of the Messiah at his first advent; and the command is, to keep up the remembrance of his death till his second advent. The ends of the prohibition are the same, whether we consider it as *given*, or as *reversed:* and the duty of every living creature is pointed out, that we must look unto the blood of our great sacrifice as the only means of reconciliation with our offended God[n]. *In reference to that* therefore we must say, "Be sure thou eat the blood: thou *mayest* eat; and thou *shalt* eat it, that it may go well with thee."]

As an IMPROVEMENT of this subject, we beg leave to add a few words of ADVICE:

1. Think not light of any sin—

[The Jews might readily have said, "What need is there of being so particular about getting out all the blood? the meat will be improved by retaining some of it; and no injury will be done to any one." We read indeed on one occasion, that they acted upon this presumption: they had taken great spoils from the Philistines, and were so eager to get some refreshment, that they overlooked in their haste the divine command. But was this deemed a just excuse for their conduct? No: they were severely reproved for it; and all the people were commanded to take their cattle to be slaughtered at a particular place, where the observance of this law might be scrutinized and secured[o]. Let not *us* then presume to set aside any of God's commands, however small they may appear, or whatever reasons we may have to extenuate the violation of them.

[l] Matt. xxvi. 27, 28. [m] 1 Cor. xi. 25, 26.
[n] Col. i. 14, 20. Heb. ix. 22. Rom. iii. 25.
[o] 1 Sam. xiv. 31—34.

them. In fact, the commission of every sin very much resembles this of which we are speaking. God has allowed us every species of gratification, if we will take it in the way and manner prescribed by him: but we say, "No; I will have it in my own way; I will not be content with the flesh, but I will have the blood. I will not indeed drink it in bowls; but I will reserve a little of it to improve the flavour of my food." What should we think of a Jew that would deliberately provoke God to anger, and bring ruin on his own soul, for such a gratification as this? Yet such is the conduct of every sinner; and such are the gratifications for which he sells his soul. O re-remember, that, if we could gain the whole world at the expense of our own souls, we should make a sad exchange. Be careful therefore not only not to violate any command of God, but not to lower in any one particular the standard of his law: for, "if in one thing only you deliberately and allowedly offend, you are guilty of all [p]," and infallibly subject yourselves to his everlasting displeasure.]

2. Above all things, think not light of the blood of Christ—

[The means used to beget a reverence for the blood which only shadoweth it forth, may clearly shew us what reverential thoughts we ought to entertain of the atoning blood of Christ. In *that* is all our hope: "by *that* alone we have redemption, even the forgiveness of sins: through *that* the vilest sinner in the universe may obtain mercy; for it is able to "cleanse us from *all* sin." It is of *that* the hosts of heaven are making mention continually before the throne of God: their anthems are addressed "to Him who loved them, and washed them from their sins in *his own blood*." Of that then should we also sing; and in that should we glory. But if we be disposed to disregard it, let us contemplate the fate of him who disregarded the typical injunction; "God declared, that he would set his face against him and cut him off." The proper reflection to be made on that, is suggested to us by God himself: "If he that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses, of how much sorer punishment suppose ye shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and counted the blood of the covenant an unholy thing [q]." It was terrible to "die without mercy;" but there is a "much sorer punishment" than that: there is a "second death," which they shall suffer, who trample on the blood of Christ. The Lord grant that we may never turn the means of happiness into an occasion of so great a calamity! Let us rather take the cup of salvation into our hands, and drink it with the liveliest emotions of gratitude and joy.]

[p] Jam. ii. 10. [q] Heb. x. 29.

## CXLIII.

### THE JEWS' LEADING OBJECTION TO CHRISTIANITY CONSIDERED.

Deut. xiii. 1—3. *If there arise among you a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams, and giveth thee a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder come to pass whereof he spake unto thee, saying, Let us go after other gods, which thou hast not known, and let us serve them; thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams: for the Lord your God proveth you, to know whether you love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul.*

IT has commonly, and with justice, been thought, that the two great pillars on which a revelation from God must stand, are, miracles, and prophecies. Without these, we cannot be assured, that any discovery which may have been made to man, is really divine. The points that are traced to a divine origin may be highly reasonable and excellent in themselves; yet, before they are clothed with a divine authority, we very properly ask, What proof is there that they are from God? what evidence do you give that they are not the offspring of your own mind? If they are from God, I take for granted that God does not leave you without witness: tell me then, what works do you perform, which no created power can perform; or what other credentials have you, whereby your heavenly mission may be known? If you can foretell things to come, I shall then know that you are from God; because none but God can certainly foreknow them: or if you can work things above, and contrary to the course of nature, then I shall know that you have that power from on high; because no created being can impart it.

This, I say, is the established mode of judging concerning a revelation from God: and, according as any thing professing to be from God is thus confirmed, or not, we give to it, or withhold from it, our assent. It is from grounds like these that we judge of the revelation given to Moses; and from similar grounds

grounds must we judge of the truth of Christianity also.

We must indeed inspect the matter of the thing revealed, to see whether it be worthy of him from whom it is said to come; and from its internal evidence our faith will derive great strength: but still in the first instance we look rather to external proofs, such as we have before spoken of.

But the Jews imagine that they are precluded from judging of Christianity on such grounds as these, since Moses, in the passage we have just read, guards them against any such inferences as we are led to draw from the prophecies and miracles on which our religion is founded. He concedes that some prophecies may be uttered, and some miracles be wrought, in favour of a false religion; and that, even if that should be the case, the Jews are not to regard any evidences arising from those sources, but to hold fast their religion in opposition to them.

This is an objection commonly urged among the Jews, when we invite them to embrace the Christian religion. That we may meet it fairly, we will, first, state the objection in all its force, and then give what we apprehend to be the proper answer to it.

We begin then with stating the objection; and we will do it in such a way as to give the Jew all possible advantage.

The scope of the passage is to guard the Jews against idolatry. They were, and would continue to be, surrounded by idolatrous nations, who would strive to the utmost to draw them from Jehovah to the worship of false gods. And the Jews themselves having from the earliest period of their existence as a people been accustomed to see the idolatrous worship of Egypt, were of themselves strongly attached to idolatry; so that it was necessary to guard them against it by the most awful menaces, and the most impressive cautions.

The caution here given is certainly most solemn. That we may give it all the force of which it is capable, we will notice distinctly these three things;

The

The supposition here made; The injunction given notwithstanding that supposition; and The argument founded on that injunction.

First, mark the supposition here made, namely, that God may permit miraculous and prophetic powers to be exercised even in support of a false religion. We are not indeed to imagine that God himself will work miracles in order to deceive his people, and lead them astray; nor are we to imagine that he will suffer Satan to work them in such an unlimited way as to be a counterbalance to the miracles by which God has confirmed his own religion: but he will, for reasons which we shall presently consider, permit *some* to be wrought, and *some* prophecies to come to pass, notwithstanding they are designed to uphold an imposture. The magicians of Pharaoh, we must confess, wrought real miracles. When they changed their rods into serpents, it was not a deception, but a reality: and when they inflicted plagues upon Egypt after the example of Moses, it was not a deception, but a reality: but at the same time that they thus, in appearance, vied with Moses himself, and with Jehovah, in whose name he came, there was abundant evidence of their inferiority to Moses, and of their being under the controul of a superior power: for the magicians could not remove one of the plagues which they themselves had produced; nor could they continue to imitate Moses in *all* the exercises of his power (from whence they themselves were led to confess their own inferiority to him); nor could they avert from themselves the plagues which Moses inflicted on them in common with the rest of the Egyptians. They were permitted to do so much as should give Pharaoh an occasion for hardening his own heart, but not sufficient to shew that they could at all come in competition with Moses.

In every age there were also false prophets, who endeavoured to draw the people from their allegiance to God; and in the multitude of prophecies that they would utter, it must be naturally supposed that *some* would be verified in the event. Our blessed Lord

Lord has taught us to expect, even under the Christian dispensation, that some efforts of this kind will be made by "Antichrist, whose coming is after the working of Satan, with all powers, and signs, and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish:" (2 Thess. ii. 9, 10.) He has moreover told us that these false prophets should "shew such signs and wonders as to deceive, if it were possible, the very elect:" (Matt. xxiv. 24.) nay more, that in the last day some will appeal to him respecting the prophecies they have uttered, and the miracles they have wrought in his name, and will plead them in arrest of judgment: (Matt. vii. 22.) We may therefore safely concede what is here supposed, namely, that God may suffer miraculous and prophetic powers to be exercised to a certain degree even in support of idolatry itself.

Now then, in the next place, let us notice the injunction given to the Jews notwithstanding this supposition. God commands them "not to give heed to that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams, even though his predictions should be verified, if his object be to turn them from him; for that he himself suffers these illusions to be practised upon them, in order that their fidelity to him may be tried, and their love to him approved."

It may seem strange that God should suffer such stumbling-blocks to be cast in the way of his people: but it is not for us to say what Jehovah may, or may not, do: we are sure that "he tempteth no man," so as to lead him into sin, (Jam. i. 13.) and that the "Judge of all the earth will do nothing but what is right." But it is a fact, that he thus permitted Job to be tried, in order that he might approve himself a perfect man: and in like manner he tried Abraham, in order that it might appear, whether his regard for God's authority, and his confidence in God's word, were sufficient to induce him to sacrifice his Isaac, the child of promise: (Gen. xxii. 1, 2, 12.) It was for similar ends that God permitted his people to be tried for forty years in the wilderness;

ness; (Deut. viii. 2.) and in the same way he has tried his Church in every period of the world. This is the true reason of so many stumbling-blocks being laid in the way of those who embrace the Christian faith. Christianity is not revealed in a way to meet with the approbation of proud and carnal men: it is foolishness to the natural man: yea, even Christ himself is a stumbling-block to some, as well as a sanctuary to others; and such a stumbling-block, as to be "a gin and a snare to both the houses of Israel," amongst whom it was foretold, "many should stumble, and fall, and be broken, and be snared, and be taken:" (Isai. viii. 14, 15.) It is God's express design in the whole constitution of our religion, to discover the secret bent of men's minds; and whilst to the humble he gave abundant evidence for their conviction, he has left to the proud sufficient difficulties to call forth their latent animosity, and to justify in their own apprehensions, their obstinate unbelief: (Luke ii. 34, 35.) He gave originally to the Jews, as he has also given to us, sufficient evidence to satisfy any candid mind: and this is all that we have any right to expect. It was not necessary that our Lord should give to every man in the Jewish nation the same evidence of his resurrection, as he gave to Thomas: it was reasonable that there should be scope left for every man to exercise his own judgment on the evidences that were placed within his reach; as our Lord said to Thomas, "Because thou hast seen, thou hast believed; but blessed are they who have not seen, and yet have believed."

Hence then God enjoined his people not to regard any person who should attempt to draw them to idolatry, even though he should work a miracle before their eyes, or foretell an event that should afterwards come to pass. They had had abundant evidence, that the religion they had embraced was from God: they possessed also in the very nature of that religion an internal evidence of its excellency: and they had received from God such demonstrations of his power and goodness, as ought to unite them to him

him in the most indissoluble bonds of faith and love. If therefore they should be induced to renounce their allegiance to him, and to transfer it to dumb idols that had never done any thing for them, nor ever could do any thing, they would betray a manifest want of love to him, and must blame themselves only, if they should ultimately be "given up to a delusion to believe a lie, and be left to perish" in their iniquity: (2 Thess. ii. 11, 12.) He would have them therefore upon their guard in relation to this matter, and resolutely to resist every attempt to draw them from him, however specious that attempt might be.

The argument founded on this injunction comes now before us with all the force that can be given to it. A Jew will say, 'You Christians found your faith on prophecies and on miracles: and admitting that Jesus did work some miracles, and did foretell some events which afterwards came to pass, God permitted it only to try us, and to prove our fidelity to him. He has cautioned us beforehand not to be led astray from him by any such things as these: he has expressly forbidden us to regard any thing that such a prophet might either say or do: nay more, he commanded that we should take such a prophet before the civil magistrate, and have him put to death: and therefore, however specious your reasonings appear, we dare not listen to them or regard them.'

Having thus given to the objection all the force that the most hostile Jew can wish, I now come in the second place to offer, what we hope will prove a satisfactory answer to it.

It cannot but have struck the attentive reader, that in this objection there are two things taken for granted; namely, that in calling Jews to Christianity we are calling them *from* Jehovah; and that our authority for calling them to Christianity is founded on such miracles as an impostor might work, and such prophecies as an impostor might expect to see verified.

But in answer to these two points we declare, first, that

that we do not call them *from* Jehovah, but *to* him;—next, that our authority is not founded on such miracles and prophecies as might have issued from an impostor, but such as it was impossible for an impostor to produce;—and lastly, that, in calling them to Christ, we have the express command of God himself.

First, we do not call our Jewish brethren *from* Jehovah, but *to* him.

We worship the very same God whom the Jews worship: and we maintain his unity as strongly as any Jew in the universe can maintain it. As for idols of every kind, we abhor them as much as Moses himself abhorred them. Moreover, we consider the law which was written on the two tables of stone as binding upon us, precisely as much as if it were again promulged by an audible voice from heaven. Instead of calling them *from* the law, we call them *to* it: we declare that every man who has transgressed it in any one particular, is deservedly condemned to everlasting misery: (Deut. xxvii. 26, Gal. iii. 10.) and it is from a consciousness that this sentence must fall on every human being who has not fled for refuge to the hope set before him in the Gospel, that we are so anxious to call both Jews and Gentiles to a belief of the Gospel. We go further, and say, that no human being can be saved, who has not a perfect obedience to that law as his justifying righteousness. But where shall we find a perfect obedience to that law? where shall we find a man who can say, he has fulfilled it in every jot and tittle? Alas! we all have transgressed it times without number: we are all therefore condemned by it: and being condemned for our disobedience, we can never be justified by our obedience to it. Would to God, that this matter were understood by the Jews! we should find no difficulty then in leading them to Christ. Did they but know what wrath they have merited, they would be glad to hear of one who has borne it for them: and did they but know how impossible it is for an imperfect obedience to

to that law to justify them, they would be glad to hear of one who has fulfilled it in all its extent, and brought in an everlasting righteousness for all who believe in him. Yes, my Jewish Brethren, know assuredly that the Christian "does not make void the law, but establishes the law:" (Rom. iii. 31.) and has no hope of salvation in any way, but such as "magnifies the law and makes it honourable;" (Isai. xlii. 21.) and it is his earnest desire that you should agree with him in this matter; because he is sure, that, when once you come to understand your own law, and see how "Christ was the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth," your difficulties will all vanish, as the morning dew before the rising sun.

With respect to the ceremonial law, we do indeed call you from the observance of that; and we have good reason so to do; for you yourselves know, that all the essential part of your religion existed before the ceremonial law was given; and that Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, who lived hundreds of years before the ceremonial law was given, were saved simply and entirely by faith in that promised "Seed, in whom all the nations of the earth are blessed." By faith then in this promised seed must you be saved: every child of Abraham must seek for acceptance in the way that Abraham did. If you ask, Why then was the ceremonial law given? I answer, To shadow forth your Messiah, and to lead you to him: and when he should come and fulfil it in all its parts, it was then to cease; and you yourselves know that it was intended by God himself to cease at that appointed time. Do you not know that your Messiah was to come out of the loins of David; and that he was also to be a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedec? But if there was to be a new priesthood after the order of Melchizedec, the priesthood of Aaron must cease: and if the new priest was to spring from David, who was of the tribe of Judah, and not from Levi to whose descendants the priesthood was confined, then it is clear from

from this also that the Aaronic priesthood must cease: and if that be changed, then must there of necessity be a change of the law also: (Heb. vii. 11, 12.) so that you yourselves know that the ceremonial law was never intended to continue any longer than the time fixed for its completion in the predicted Messiah. If then we call you from the outward observances of that law, it is not from disrespect to that law, but from a conviction that it has been fulfilled and abrogated by the Lord Jesus. We call you only from shadows to the substance. We call you to Christ as uniting in himself all that the ceremonial law was intended to shadow forth. He is the true tabernacle, in whom dwells all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. He is the true "Lamb slain from the foundation of the world," even that "Lamb of God which, as John the Baptist testified, taketh away the sins of the world." He is the great High Priest, who, having "through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God," is now "entered into the holy place with his own blood," and there "ever liveth to make intercession for us;" and is to come forth from thence once more to bless in his Father's name his waiting people. I wish then, my Jewish brethren, that you would particularly bear this in mind. We honour the ceremonial law as admirably calculated to prepare your minds for the Gospel; not only because it exhibited so fully and so minutely every part of the Mediatorial office which our Lord was to sustain, but because by the burthensomeness of its rites it tended to break your spirit, and to make you sigh for deliverance. And methinks, it should be no grievance to you to be called from those observances, because you neither do, nor can, continue them: the destruction of your city and temple, and your whole ecclesiastical and civil polity, have rendered it impossible for you to comply with them, and have thus shut you up to the faith of Abraham, which is the faith of the Gospel.

I am aware that in calling you to worship the Lord Jesus Christ we appear to you to be transferring to him

him the honour due to God alone. But if you will look into your own Scriptures, you will find that the person who was foretold as your Messiah is no other than God himself. Examine the Psalm before referred to, (the cxth) and see how David speaks of your Messiah: "The LORD said unto my LORD, Sit thou on my right hand till I make thine enemies thy footstool." David here calls him Jehovah: and how could he do that, if that title did not properly belong to him? This question Jesus put to the Pharisees in his day; and they could not answer him a word: nor can all the Rabbies upon the face of the earth suggest any satisfactory answer to it now. The only answer that can be given is, that the same person, who as man, was David's son, as Jehovah, was David's Lord, or, as Isaiah calls him, "Emanuel, God with us." Receive him in the character in which the prophet Isaiah foretold his advent, as "the Child born, the Son given, the Wonderful Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Prince of peace." Call him, as another prophet instructs you, "JEHOVAH OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS:" and know, that, in thus "honouring Christ, you will honour the Father who sent him."

This then is my first answer; that in no respect whatever do we call you from God, but wholly and altogether to him; to Him, as the One true God, in opposition to all idols; to his law, as fulfilled in Christ, and directing you to him; and to his Gospel, as the completion and consummation of all the wonders of his love. In as far as we call you from your present course, it is only from types and shadows to the substance and reality. You remember that at the moment of our Lord's death the vail of the temple was rent in twain, and the most holy place was laid open to the view of all who were worshipping before it. The way into the holiest being thus opened to you all by God himself, we invite all to enter in with boldness, and assure you in God's name that you shall find acceptance with him.

The next thing which we proposed to shew was, that

that our authority for calling you thus to Christ is not founded on such prophecies or miracles as might have issued from an impostor, but on such as it was impossible for an impostor to produce.

Consider the prophecies: they were not some few dark predictions of mysterious import and of doubtful issue, uttered by our Lord himself; but a continued series of prophecies from the very fall of Adam to the time of Christ; of prophecies comprehending an almost infinite variety of subjects, and those so minute, as to defy all concert either in those who uttered, or those who fulfilled, them. A great multitude of them were of such a kind that they could not possibly be fulfilled by any but the most inveterate enemies. Who but an enemy would have nailed him to the cross, or pierced him to the heart with a spear, or offered him gall and vinegar to drink, or mocked and insulted him in the midst of all his agonies? Do not these put his Messiahship beyond a doubt? I will mention only one prophecy of Christ himself; but it is such an one as no impostor would utter, and no impostor could fulfil. What impostor would rest all the credit of his mission on his being put to a cruel, ignominious, and accursed death, and rising from the dead the third day? Or if an impostor were foolish enough to utter such a prophecy, how, when he was actually dead, could he fulfil it? But the whole Scriptures predicted these things of Jesus, as Jesus also did of himself: and the exact fulfilment of them proves beyond all reasonable doubt his true Messiahship.

Consider the miracles also: these were beyond all comparison greater and more numerous than Moses ever wrought. The healing all manner of diseases was the daily and hourly employment of the Lord Jesus for the three or four last years of his life. The whole creation, men, devils, fishes, elements, all obeyed his voice; and at his command the dead arose to life again. But there is one miracle also which in particular we will mention. Jesus said, "I have power to lay down my life, and I have power to take

take it again:" and the former of these he proved by speaking with a loud voice the very instant he gave up the ghost, shewing thereby, that he did not die in consequence of his nature being exhausted, but by a voluntary surrender of his life into his Father's hands. And at the appointed time he proved the latter also, notwithstanding all the preparations made to defeat his purpose, all of which proved in the issue the strongest testimonies to the truth of his word. But would an impostor have pretended to such a power; or when actually dead, could he have exercised it? And, when the interval between his death and resurrection was to be so short, would not the stone, the seal, the watch, have been sufficient to secure the detection of the imposture? Farther, would an impostor have undertaken to send down the Holy Ghost after his death for the purpose of enabling his followers to speak all manner of languages, and of working all kinds of miracles; or if he had predicted such things, could he have fulfilled them? Judge then whether here be not ground enough for that faith which we call you to exercise towards him? If there be not, how do you prove the divine authority of your own Lawgiver? In point of testimony, great as was that which proved the divine mission of Moses, it was nothing when compared with that which substantiated the Messiahship of Jesus. We therefore confidently call you to believe in him, and to embrace the salvation which he offers you in the Gospel.

But there is one great argument which we have reserved till now, in order that it may bear upon you with the greater weight. We declare to you then, in the last place, that, in calling you to Christ, we have the express command of God himself.

Moses, in chapter xiii. of Deuteronomy, bids you, as we have seen, not to listen to any false prophet: but in chapter xviii. 18, 19. he most explicitly declares, that a Prophet should arise, to whom you should attend. Hear his own words: "I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto

unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I command him. And it shall come to pass, that whosoever will not hearken unto my words which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him."

Now I ask you, Who is the Prophet here spoken of? Where was there ever, besides Moses, a prophet that was a Mediator, a Lawgiver, a Ruler, a Deliverer? Was there ever such an one, except Jesus? And was not Jesus such an one in all respects? Yes; he has wrought for you not a mere temporal deliverance like Moses, but a spiritual and eternal deliverance from sin and Satan, death and hell: He has redeemed you, not by power only, but by price also, even the inestimable price of his own blood. Having thus bought you with his blood, he ever liveth in heaven itself to make continual intercession for you. A new law also has he given you, "the law of faith," in conformity to which he enjoins you to walk, and by which he will judge you in the last day. Of this blessed person all your own Prophets have spoken; and this very Moses, in whom you trust, declares to you, that, "if you will not hear and obey this Prophet, God will require it of you." When therefore you plead the authority of Moses, we join issue with you, and say, *Be consistent.* Renounce false prophets, because he bids you: but believe in the true Prophet, whom God according to his word has raised up to you, because he bids you. Let his authority weigh equally with you in both cases: and then we shall not fear, but that you will embrace the salvation offered you in the Gospel, and be the spiritual children, as ye already are the natural descendants, of believing Abraham. "Abraham looked forward with eager expectation to see the day of Christ, and saw it, and was glad." May ye also now see it, and rejoice in him as your Saviour for evermore!

It is for your partiality in this respect that God has punished you now these 1700 years, and is punishing you at this day. He told you, "he would

require of you" your rejection of this Prophet; and he has required it more severely, than he has all your other sins ever since you became a nation. O repent of this evil, and turn to God in his appointed way! so shall his wrath be turned away from you, and "you shall be saved *in the Lord* with an everlasting salvation."

We cannot conclude our subject without suggesting a suitable improvement of it to our Christian Brethren.

As the Jews were constantly assailed by idolaters who sought to draw them from the worship of the true God, so are you by infidels, or worldlings, to draw you from the belief or practice of the Gospel. But do infidels assault you? Ask them whether their objections, all of which arise from ignorance alone, are sufficient to invalidate all the evidences which may be adduced in support of our religion? If not, then "hold fast the profession of your faith without wavering." Do worldlings tell you that God does not require you to renounce the world, and to give yourselves up entirely to him? Ask them, what proof they can give, that God has authorized them to set aside the plainest declarations of his word. You may expect at least that they shall be possessed of miraculous and prophetic powers, or else they have not so much as the semblance of true prophets. But even if they had these powers and displayed them evidently before your eyes, yet ought you not to regard their counsels, because they seek to turn you from God to a poor perishing and worthless idol; from God, who has redeemed you by the blood of his only dear Son, and given you all things in and with him, to an idol, that never has done any thing for you, nor ever can. Be firm therefore, even though your father or your mother, your brother or your sister, or even the wife of your own bosom, should seek to turn you from the Lord. Your plain answer to them all is, "Whether it be right to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye." Whatever temptations they offer, or menaces they employ, let nothing induce you to draw

draw back from following the Lord fully. "Be faithful unto death; and he will give you a crown of life."

## CXLIV.

### GUILT AND DANGER OF DEPARTING FROM GOD.

Deut. xiii. 6—11. *If thy brother, the son of thy mother, or thy son or thy daughter, or the wife of thy bosom, or thy friend which is as thine own soul, entice thee secretly, saying, Let us go and serve other gods which thou hast not known, thou, nor thy fathers; namely, of the gods of the people which are round about you, nigh unto thee, or far off from thee, from the one end of the earth even unto the other end of the earth; thou shalt not consent unto him, nor hearken unto him; neither shall thine eye pity him, neither shalt thou spare, neither shalt thou conceal him; but thou shalt surely kill him; thine hand shall be first upon him to put him to death, and afterwards the hand of all the people. And thou shalt stone him with stones, that he die; because he hath sought to thrust thee away from the Lord thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage. And all Israel shall hear, and fear, and shall do no more any such wickedness as this is among you.*

THERE is a striking difference between the laws of man and the laws of God: those which are framed by human legislators, proportion always the sanctions to the influence which crimes have upon the public welfare: whereas those enacted by our heavenly Lawgiver, mark with greater severity the evils which more immediately affect his own honour and glory. If one man robbed or maimed another, his law required only a fourfold restitution, or the infliction of a punishment precisely similar to the injury sustained: but if a man, even the dearest relative they had, should only propose to any of his people to worship another god in preference to Jehovah, he must instantly be brought before the magistrates, and, on conviction of the offence, be stoned to death.

It will be proper to consider this ordinance in a two-fold view;

I. As a temporary enactment—



This

This enactment, or law, appears at first sight to be severe: but we undertake to shew that it was,

1. Just, as it respected the individual—

[The greatest crimes against any human government are *treason*, and *murder*; and, by the general consent of mankind, the principals who are found guilty of those crimes are put to death. Now, in the tempting of men to idolatry, both these crimes were contained: there was *treason* against the King of kings; and there was *murder*, not indeed of the bodies, but of the souls, of men. The person who made the proposal, did by that very act endeavour to draw men from their allegiance to God, and to engage them on the side of God's enemy and rival. And, as far as his endeavours were attended with success, he eternally destroyed all who complied with his solicitations. Now compare the crimes, and see whether those committed against God and the souls of men be not infinitely more heinous than those which reach no further than to human governments, and the bodily life: and, if they be, the justice of the punishment annexed to them will admit of no doubt: it will be just, that he whose throne we should subvert, would inflict upon us the penalty of death; and that they whom we would ruin for ever, should be made the executioners of that sentence.]

2. Merciful, as it respected the public—

[The Jews had been nurtured in the midst of an idolatrous nation; and, after their settlement in Canaan, they were surrounded with idolaters on every side. Moreover they were of themselves exceedingly addicted to idolatry. But the consequence of their departure from God would be, that they would bring his heaviest judgments upon them, and be reduced to a more calamitous condition than any people under heaven. But God was graciously pleased to put a barrier in their way, which, it might be hoped, they should never be able to pass. He not only annexed the penalty of death to *an act* of idolatry, but even to *a proposal* to commit that sin: yea, to prevent such a proposal from being ever made, he not only authorized, but commanded, the person to whom it was made, to give immediate information of it to the magistrates, and to be the first in inflicting the punishment of death. If the person making the proposal should be ever so dear to him, though it should be his own brother, or son or daughter, or even the wife of his bosom, or his friend that is as his own soul, he must make no difference; he must shew no respect of persons whatever: "Thou shalt not *consent* unto him, says God, nor *hearken* unto him; neither shall thine eye *pity* him, neither shalt thou *spare*, neither shalt thou *conceal* him; but *thou* shalt surely *kill* him:" all natural affection must be laid aside, and be swallowed up in a concern for God's honour; and he

he himself must become the informer, the witness, and the executioner, even where the delinquent is dearer to him than his own soul. What child, what wife, what friend, if he had conceived an idolatrous inclination in his heart, would dare to mention it, when the person to whom he should mention it was precluded from all exercise of mercy, and was constrained to proceed against him according to this law? Thus then provision was made to prevent the possibility, as it should seem, of the nation ever yielding to idolatry, or provoking God to abandon them according to the threatenings which he had denounced against them. We are informed in the text that the very *execution* of this law was designed to produce this salutary effect[a]; and therefore much more must the *enactment* of it be an expression of love and mercy to the whole nation.]

This law indeed was only temporary: it was to continue in force only during the continuance of the Jewish polity: but it is nevertheless most instructive to us,

II. As a lasting admonition—

To the very end of time it will speak loudly to us; it declares to us, in the strongest terms,

1. The evil of departing from God—

[The annexing of the penalty of death, and of so cruel a death as that of stoning, is of itself no slight intimation of the evil of idolatry: but the requiring a man to execute this sentence against the wife of his bosom, or the friend that is as his own soul; the requiring him to do it even on account of a mere proposal, though the proposal was never carried into effect; the not suffering him to overlook or conceal the matter, but constraining him instantly to enforce the law without pity; how was it possible for God himself to mark the evil of this sin in blacker colours, or to shew his abhorrence of it in a stronger manner, than by such an enactment as this? The command to destroy a whole city for idolatry was scarcely a more awful demonstration of his anger than this[aa].

But it may be said, "This was idolatry, a sin to which we have no temptation." It was idolatry: but permit me to ask, wherein the great evil of idolatry consists? Is it not in alienating our affections from God, and placing them on some creature? Is it not justly described by the Apostle as "loving and serving the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for evermore!" Is it not in this very view of the subject that covetousness is called idolatry, and that men are said to make "a god of their belly?" Is it not in this view that St. John says to all the Christian Church,

[a] ver. 11. [aa] ver. 12—18.

Church, "Little children, keep yourselves from idols"? What then does it signify, that we are not bowing down to stocks and stones, if there be idols enthroned in our hearts? God is equally provoked to jealousy, whether our idolatry be open and carnal, or secret and spiritual: and though he does not authorize *man* to proceed against us, he will take the matter into his own hand, and inflict upon us the punishment we deserve. It is in reference to this that St. Paul utters that severe denunciation against all who decline from their love to Christ; "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be *anathema, maran-atha;*" that is, His departure from Christ deserves the heaviest judgments; and, though we are not now at liberty to inflict them, *God surely and quickly will.*

O that all who have waxed cold in their affections towards God, would lay this to heart! If God be not seated on the throne of our hearts and sweetly ruling and reigning there, the creature is: and whether the idol be pleasure, or riches, or honour, or any thing else, however excellent or however base, we are idolaters; and shall be made to feel, that "it is an evil and bitter thing to forsake the Lord;" yea, that "it were better never to have known him, than, after knowing him, to depart from him."]

2. The danger of being accessary to any one's departure from him—

[There are a variety of ways in which we may be instrumental in turning others from God. What if we scoff at religion, and deride the practice of it as folly and enthusiasm; do we not, in fact, say to those around us, "Come, let us serve other gods?" What if we exert our influence and authority to deter people from attending where the word is preached with fidelity and power, or from associating with the despised followers of Jesus; are we not yet more decidedly guilty of hostility to God? for when we only scoff at religion, we leave people an alternative; but when we set ourselves to intimidate men from following after God, we are no longer *seducers*, but *persecutors*. But, supposing we do not take so decided a part against God, yet, if all our fears are against excess in religion, and none against a defect in it, if all the advice we give is to shun the cross and avoid the shame of a religious profession, and none at all to "endure the cross and despise the shame," whom is it that we serve? Can we with propriety be called the friends and servants of our God? No: find us in all the sacred records one single servant of his that ever shewed such dispositions as these. I forget: we can find one: we remember Peter's kind solicitude for his Master, and his affectionate expression of it too; "Master, spare thyself:" but we remember also the answer of Jesus to him; "Get thee behind me, *Satan;* thou art an offence unto me;

me; for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but the things that be of men." Let me then warn friends and relatives of every description how they use their influence; lest, whilst they think that they are shewing kindness to man, they be found in reality fighting against God. Let me remind them, that, whether they succeed or not, their guilt is the same; they have made the proposal, and for that proposal they shall die: and would to God that the being stoned to death were the worst punishment they shall endure! but, alas! it were infinitely "better that a millstone were put about their neck, and that they were cast into the midst of the sea, than that they should offend one of God's little ones:" it were better, I say; because they would lose only the bodily life: but in turning any one from God, they forfeit their own souls, and expose themselves to everlasting misery in hell. If friends would see what use they should make of their influence, the prophet will tell them; they should endeavour to draw one another nearer unto God; and should themselves endeavour to lead the way[b].]

3. The need we have of firmness and stedfastness in religion—

[No one can tell what temptations he may have to encounter, or from what quarter they shall spring, or how specious and powerful they may be. Perhaps the children whom we have fondled with delight, or the wife of our bosom, or the friend that is as our own soul, may be our tempters to decline from God, or the occasions of our yielding to temptation. Perhaps the suggestion may be so specious, that it shall appear to have come from a prophet of the Lord, and to have been confirmed by a sign from heaven[c]. But our principles of religion should be so fixed, as to be incapable of being moved even by an angel from heaven[d]; and our practice of it should be so determined, that no considerations whatsoever should be able to make us swerve for one moment from the path of duty. The fate of the man of God who listened to the lying prophet, should teach us this[e]. Our rule is clear, and we should follow it without turning either to the right hand or the left[f].

But it will be asked, How shall I obtain this stedfastness? I answer, Compare the God whom you serve, with all the gods that are his rivals and competitors. This is the consideration by which God himself enforces that which might otherwise have appeared a sanguinary edict: he grounds the severity of his displeasure on the greatness of the mercies he had bestowed upon them[g]. But what were those mercies in comparison of the blessings he has conferred on you? Think *from what a bondage* you are

[b] Zech. viii. 21. [c] ver. 1—5. 2 Cor. xi. 13—15.
[d] Gal. i. 8, 9. [e] 1 Kin. xiii. 18—24.
[f] ver. 4. [g] ver. 10.

are redeemed; think *by what means* that redemption has been accomplished for you; think *what an inheritance* is purchased for you; and then say whether any thing in this world can have such a claim to your regards as the Lord Jesus Christ has. Only get your hearts impressed with a sense of his love, and the vanities of time and sense will be to you no more than the dirt under your feet. Only commit yourselves to Christ, "and be strong in the grace that is in him," and you will find that "neither angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate you from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus:" for "he is able to keep you from falling," and "will preserve you blameless unto his heavenly kingdom." Whatever then your temptations be, or from whatever quarter they may spring, I say to every one of you, "Hold fast that thou hast, and let no man take thy crown[h]."]

[h] Rev. iii. 11.

## CXLV.

### THE RELEASE OF BOND-SERVANTS.

Deut. xv. 12—15. *If thy brother, an Hebrew man, or an Hebrew woman, be sold unto thee, and serve thee six years; then in the seventh year thou shalt let him go free from thee. And when thou sendest him out free from thee, thou shalt not let him go away empty: thou shalt furnish him liberally out of thy flock, and out of thy floor, and out of thy wine-press: of that wherewith the Lord thy God hath blessed thee thou shalt give unto him. And thou shalt remember that thou wast a bond-man in the land of Egypt, and the Lord thy God redeemed thee: therefore I command thee this thing to-day.*

BENEVOLENCE characterized the whole of the Jewish law; as well of that law which regulated the state, as of that which was to govern the souls of individuals. Some things indeed were tolerated under that dispensation which do not accord with the more sublime morality of the Gospel. Polygamy and divorce were suffered, on account of the hardness of the people's hearts, and in order to prevent the still greater evils which would have resulted from the entire prohibition of them. Slavery also was permitted for the same reasons: but still there

were

were restraints put upon men in relation to these things, and many regulations were framed, to counteract the abuses which were likely to flow from the licence afforded them. It was permitted to men to purchase slaves, and *that* even from among their brethren. But an express command was given, that no man should "rule over them with rigour;" that every slave should be liberated after six years of service; and that ample provision should be made for him on his dismission, in order that he might be able in future to support himself. It is of this ordinance that we are now to speak: and in it we may see,

I. An encouraging emblem—

As the whole of the ceremonial law, so parts also of the judicial law, were of a typical nature. This appointment in particular emblematically represented two things;

1. The redemption which God vouchsafes to his people—

[Both Scripture and experience attest, that all mankind are in a state of bondage. They are "tied and bound with the chain of their sins:" they are "led captive by the Devil at his will" — — — But the time is come when we are permitted to assert our liberty. The Lord Jesus Christ has "proclaimed liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound:" and it must be by our own voluntary consent alone that we can be retained any longer in our former bondage. Whatever had been the occasion of the Hebrew servant's bondage, whether he had sold himself through poverty, or been sold by a relentless creditor to pay his debts, or been sentenced to such a punishment by the civil magistrate for his crimes, he was equally free the very moment that the six years of his servitude were expired. Thus it is with us: there is no room to ask in desponding strains, "Shall the prey be taken from the mighty, or *the lawful captive* delivered[a]?" for the truth now sounds in our ears, and "the truth shall make us free[b]." As surely as ever Moses was sent to the oppressed Israelites to deliver them, so surely are the tidings of salvation now sent to us: and though our tyrannical master may use his utmost efforts to keep us in subjection, he shall not prevail. The Lord Jesus Christ is come to deliver us; and "if the Son make us free, we shall be free indeed[c]."]

2. The

[a] Isai. xlix. 24, 25. [b] John viii. 32. [c] ib. ver. 36.

2. The mercy which he exercises towards his redeemed—

[There was a direction given to Moses, that the people at their departure from Egypt should "borrow of their neighbours jewels of silver and jewels of gold, and that they should spoil the Egyptians;" "When ye go," said God to them, "ye shall not go empty[d]." In like manner this injunction was given to the Hebrew master, at the time when he should be required to liberate his slave; "Thou shalt not let him go away empty: thou shalt furnish him liberally out of thy flock, and out of thy floor, and out of thy wine-press: of that wherewith the Lord thy God hath blessed thee, thou shalt give unto him." And is it not thus that God deals with his redeemed people? "Does he require any man to go a warfare at his own charges?" True it is, he does not set up his people with a stock of grace, that they may afterwards live independent of him; but "he will supply all their need" out of the fulness which he has treasured up for them in Christ Jesus; and "out of that fulness they shall all receive, even grace for grace[e]." Yes assuredly, this picture shall be realized in all who assert their liberty: for "they that fear the Lord shall want no manner of thing that is good."]

But besides this emblematical representation, there is in the text,

II. An instructive lesson—

The Hebrew Masters were bidden to "remember, that they themselves were once bond-men in the land of Egypt," and that on that very account God had given them this command in relation to their bond-slaves. From hence it appears, that we are to regard God's mercies,

1. As a pattern for our imitation—

[When Israel were groaning under their burthens in Egypt, God said, "I have surely seen the affliction of my people; I know their sorrows:" and on another occasion we are told, "His soul was grieved for the misery of Israel[f]." And when once they were liberated from their bondage, what incessant kindness did he shew them, administering to all their wants, and fulfilling all their desires! This was the conduct which the Hebrew masters were to imitate: and this tenderness, this compassion, this sympathy, this love, is to characterize his people to the end of time. Remarkable is that direction given us by the apostle Paul; "Be ye followers (imitators[g]) of God, as dear children; and walk in love, as Christ has loved us." Here the same principle

[d] Exod. iii. 21, 22.
[e] Col. i. 19. with John i. 16.
[f] Judg. x. 16.
[g] μιμηται, Eph. v. 1, 2.

ciple is established: we are to imitate God in all his imitable perfections, and especially in that which is the crown and summit of them all, unbounded love. We are, as far as it is possible for finite creatures to do it, to tread in the very steps of Christ himself, and to follow him even in that stupendous effort of love, his dying on the cross; for St. John, having spoken of his "love in laying down his life for us," adds, "And *we* ought to lay down *our* lives for the brethren[h]." What an object for our ambition is here! O that we might be satisfied with nothing short of this! that instead of admiring ourselves on account of more common exercises of love, we might rather see how defective we are even in our best duties; and might learn to overlook all past attainments as nothing, and to be pressing forward for higher degrees of conformity to our God and Saviour[i]!]

2. As a motive for our exertion—

[The mercy vouchsafed to the Jewish nation was to operate on all of them as an incentive to obedience; and, as God had required acts of love to our brethren as the best evidence of our love to him, it is in that more especially that we must endeavour to requite the loving-kindness of our God. The man that grudges a few pence to a fellow-servant after having been forgiven by his Lord a debt of ten thousand talents, can expect nothing but indignation from the hands of God[k]. The true spirit of God's redeemed people was well exemplified in the apostle Paul, when he declared, "The love of Christ constraineth us, because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead; and that he died for all, that they who live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him who died for them, and rose again." If then we have any hope that we ourselves have been partakers of mercy, let us feel our obligations, and say with David, "What shall I render unto the Lord for all the benefits that he hath done unto me?" and, if we have in ourselves an evidence that God hath "bought us with a price," let us strive to the uttermost to "glorify him with our bodies and our spirits, which are his[l]."]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who are yet in bondage to sin and Satan—

[Why should you continue in bondage another day? May not the past time suffice to have served such hard masters? and is not liberty at this moment proclaimed to you? "Behold, this is the accepted time, this is the day of salvation." Think not of the difficulties that are in your way, but of the power that will enable you to surmount them. He who rescued Israel from Egypt, yet liveth; and "will shew himself strong in behalf of all who call upon him." If you continue in your bondage, O think of the wages that you will receive! "the wages of sin is

[h] 1 John iii. 16. [i] Phil. iii. 13—15. [k] Matt. xviii. 32—34.
[l] 1 Cor. vi. 20.

is death?"—but if you assert your liberty, you shall be numbered among "the freemen of the Lord," and have HIM for your portion in time and in eternity.]

2. Those who profess to have been freed from their bondage—

[You have seen wherein you are to glorify your God. Remember, that it is in relative life especially you are to shew forth the power of divine grace. Let it be seen in your households, that you are enabled to walk worthy of your high calling. It is in your families that the truth and excellence of your principles is to be displayed. It is easy enough to be kind and liberal abroad; but look to it that these graces are exercised at home: let your wife, your children, your servants reap the benefit of your conversion. Let liberality be in your hearts, and the law of kindness in your lips. Shew that religion is an operative principle; and that it is uniform in its operation: and know that a profession of religion without such an exhibition of its power, will be accounted no better than hypocrisy either by God or man. If you would be approved of God at last, you must "adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things."]

## CXLVI.

### THE SERVANT DEVOTING HIMSELF TO HIS MASTER'S SERVICE.

Deut. xv. 16, 17. *And it shall be, if he say unto thee, I will not go away from thee, (because he loveth thee and thine house, because he is well with thee,) then thou shalt take an awl, and thrust it through his ear unto the door, and he shall be thy servant for ever.*

THE work of redemption was typified, not only by stated proclamations of liberty every fiftieth year, which was called the year of jubilee, but also by provision that all Hebrew servants, for whatever cause they had become bond-men, should be liberated from their bondage after the expiration of six years. But it would sometimes happen that a person might be so well pleased with his situation as not to wish to leave it, but to prefer it before that to which he was entitled. For such cases particular provision was made by God himself; and a very singular rite was appointed for the ratification of his purpose: On declaring before a magistrate that he chose to continue his master's bond-servant, his master was

was to bore his ear through with an awl to the door or door-post; and the servant could never afterwards claim his liberty till the year of jubilee.

We should not have ventured to annex any great importance to this ordinance, if the inspired writers themselves had not led the way. But we apprehend that they refer to it as a type; and in that view we conceive it deserves peculiar attention. We shall endeavour therefore to point out to you,

I. Its typical reference—

It is well known that our Saviour, as Mediator between God and man, was the Father's servant[a]: in this capacity he set himself wholly to do the Father's will[b]; and never for one moment admitted so much as a thought of relinquishing his service, till he could say, "I have finished the work which thou hast given me to do."

Let us briefly notice this at the different periods of his humiliation—

[*At his incarnation.*—When the fulness of time was come, and the season had arrived when he must assume our fallen nature in order to execute the work assigned him, though he must empty himself of all his glory, and leave his Father's bosom, and "make himself of no reputation, and take upon him the form of a servant," and be "made in the likeness of sinful flesh," and bear all the infirmities (the sinless infirmities) of our nature, he would not go back from the engagements which he had entered into with his Father, but condescended to be born of a virgin, and to become bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh. He loved the work he had undertaken; he delighted in the prospect of glorifying his Father, and saving our ruined race; and accounted no condescension too great for the accomplishing of this stupendous purpose.

*At the time of his sufferings and death*, he still persisted in his resolution to do and suffer all that was necessary for our redemption. He often forewarned his Disciples of the precise sufferings which he was to endure: and when one of the most highly favoured among them endeavoured to dissuade him from his purpose, he reproved him with great severity[c], determining never to recede till he had completed the work which he had engaged to perform. When, under the pressure of inconceivable agonies, his human nature began, as it were, to fail, he still maintained

[a] Isai. xlii. 1. John xii. 49. [b] John iv. 34. [c] Matt. xvi. 21—23.

maintained his stedfastness; "Not my will, but thine be done." Had it pleased him, even when apprehended by his enemies, or hanging on the cross, to terminate his sufferings before the time, he might have had legions of angels sent for his deliverance[d]: but he would not suffer the cup to pass from him till he had drunk it to the lowest dregs.]

All this, it may be said, is very true; but what relation has it to the point before us? We answer, that this stedfastness of his in performing engagements, which without any necessity on his part he had undertaken, was the very thing typified in the ordinance we are now considering.

[The Psalmist expressly speaking of Christ's appointment to make that atonement for sin which the Mosaic sacrifices only prefigured, says, (in allusion to the ordinance before us,) that God the Father had "opened, or bored, the ears" of his servant[e]. And St. Paul, citing that very passage, quotes it, not in the same precise words, but according to their true meaning: "Sacrifice and burnt-offering thou wouldest not; but *a body hast thou prepared me*[f]." Moreover both the inspired writers go on to mark in the strongest terms the determination of heart with which the Messiah *should* fulfil, and actually *did* fulfil, the inconceivably arduous task which he had undertaken[g].]

Trusting that we have not been guided by fancy in our interpretation of this type, let us inquire into,

II. The practical instruction to be deduced from it—

As a *civil* ordinance, it seems to have been well calculated to instil into the minds both of masters and servants a strict attention to each other's happiness

[d] Matt. xxvi. 53, 54. [e] Ps. xl. 6—8. [f] Heb. x. 5—7.

[g] Note the varied expressions; "Lo, I come: I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart." These, applied as they are to *the whole* of the Messiah's humiliation, (Heb. x. 8—10.) mark strongly his determination as grounded upon love.

The circumstance of the Septuagint translation of the 40th Psalm containing the same words as the Apostle quotes, proves nothing either *for* or *against* the point in hand. We apprehend that some early transcriber of the Septuagint, from a deference to St. Paul's authority, altered that translation to make it agree with his words: for we have no reason to think that the Seventy would have presumed to paraphrase that part of the Psalm, instead of translating it; and we are certain that they could not have paraphrased it in that manner (unless by express revelation for that purpose), because they neither had, nor could have, sufficiently clear views of the Gospel, to mark its deepest mystery in so precise a way.

piness and welfare, so that neither of them might ever wish for a dissolution of their mutual bonds. (And O! that our present consideration of it might be so improved by all who sustain either of those relations!) But, as a *typical* ordinance, it must, in its practical improvement, have a wider range.

Our blessed Lord has not only redeemed us to God by his blood, but has also "set us an example, that we should follow his steps." Hence it is evident that we should,

1. Love the service of our God—

[We should not account any of "his commandments grievous," or say concerning any precept of his, "This is an hard saying." He himself has told us that "his yoke is easy, and his burthen is light:" and in our Liturgy we acknowledge "his service to be perfect freedom." Such was the language of David: "O how I love thy law!" and again, "I esteem thy commandments concerning all things to be right; and I hate every false way." Let it "not then be of constraint that you serve him, but willingly and of a ready mind." And if you foresee difficulties and trials in your way, be not ashamed; but give up yourself unreservedly to God, and adopt the language of the Messiah himself, "Lo, I come; I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart"———]

2. Adhere to it stedfastly to the latest hour of your life—

[Many reasons might have operated on the mind of a servant to prevent him from perpetuating his bondage. He might fear an alteration in the behaviour of his master, and comfort himself with the idea of liberty. In like manner we may paint to ourselves many trials that may be avoided, and many gratifications that may be enjoyed, by declining the service of our God. But let no considerations operate upon your minds: you shall lose no gratification that shall not be far overbalanced by the comfort of a good conscience; nor suffer any trial, which shall not be recompensed with a proportionable weight of glory in a better world. You are not likely to lose more than Paul; yet he says, "What was gain to me, that I counted loss for Christ; yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of him." You are not likely to *suffer* more than he: yet he says, "But none of these things move me; neither count I my life dear unto myself." Thus let it be with you: "Be not weary in well-doing;" but "cleave unto the Lord with full purpose of heart:" "Be stedfast, immoveable, and always

always abounding in his work:" "Be faithful unto death, and he shall give you a crown of life" ———]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who have already declined from the Lord's ways—

[I ask not what sufferings you have avoided, or what pleasures you have gained. This only will I ask; Are you as happy as you were? I am content to put the whole to this issue; and to abide by the decision of your own conscience. I know that though a conscience may be seared, a soul cannot be happy that departs from God. O think what a master you have slighted; and say, "I will return unto my first husband, for then it was better with me than now."]

2. Those who are doubting whether to devote themselves to God or not—

[Many there are who, seeing the necessity of serving God, are contriving how they may do it with the least risk or trouble to themselves. They are thinking to "serve both God and Mammon." But this is impossible, because the two services are opposite and inconsistent. Let us not however be misunderstood. We *may*, and *must*, fulfil our duties in the world, yea, and fulfil them diligently too: but God alone must be our Lord and Governor. He will not accept such a measure of our affection and service as the world will deign to allow him; but says, "My Son, give me thy heart," thy whole heart. Every interest of ours, and every wish, must be subordinated to his will. Determine this then with yourselves, that you will be his, *wholly* and *for ever*. Let your ears be bored to his door-post: and let, not your actions merely, but your very thoughts, be henceforth kept in a willing captivity to him. "If Baal be God, serve him: but if the Lord be God, then serve him."]

3. Those who profess themselves his willing and devoted servants—

[Shew to the world that his service is a reasonable and a delightful service. Let not the difference between you and others be found merely in some foolish peculiarities, but in a holy, heavenly conversation. And be not mournful and dejected, as if God were an hard master; but "serve him with gladness and joyfulness of heart," that all around you may see the comforts of religion, and know, from what they behold in you, that the Church militant and Church triumphant are *one*; one in occupation, and one in joy.]

## CXLVII.

### THE METHOD OF EXPIATING AN UNKNOWN MURDER.

Deut. xxi. 6—8. *And all the elders of that city that are next unto the slain man, shall wash their hands over the heifer that is beheaded in the valley; and they shall answer and say, Our hands have not shed this blood, neither have our eyes seen it. Be merciful, O Lord, unto thy people Israel, whom thou hast redeemed, and lay not innocent blood unto thy people of Israel's charge. And the blood shall be forgiven them.*

THE ceremonial law of the Jews was confessedly figurative and typical in every part: nor was even their judicial law altogether destitute of a spiritual import. The injunction, "not to muzzle the ox that trod out the corn," appears as void of any, except a literal, meaning, as any law whatever; yet was there in that law a particular reverence to the preachers of the Gospel, who were to be supported by the people to whom they ministered. In the law that we are now to consider, there is indeed a manifest appearance of mystery: and we shall find it by no means unprofitable to consider the mystery contained in it. We shall endeavour then,

I. To explain the ordinance—

In doing this we must notice,

1. Its general design—

[God, no doubt, intended by this law *to prevent the commission of murder*. The shedding of human blood was, in his eyes, so great a crime, that it must never be pardoned by the civil magistrate. If a wilful murderer had fled to a city of refuge, or even to the altar itself, neither the one nor the other was to prove a sanctuary to him; he must be taken thence, and be carried forth for execution[a]. In the event of a slain man being found, and the murderer being unknown, this law was to be carried into effect: the elders of the city that was nearest to the slain man, (which, if doubtful, was to be ascertained by measurement,) were, together with the priests, to go to a rough valley, and there slay a heifer, and wash their hands over him, protesting their own innocence, and their inability to discover the offender; and

[a] See Numb. xxxv. 31, 33. Deut. xix. 11—13. & Exod. xxi. 14.

and in that manner to implore forgiveness for the guilty land[b]. Now this had a tendency to strike a terror into the minds of all the people, to fill them with an abhorrence of murder, to shew them what pains would be taken to discover the person who should be guilty of it, and what terrible vengeance he must expect at the hands of God, though he should escape the punishment that he deserved from man. Somewhat of a similar process obtains amongst us: a Coroner's inquest is taken whenever a suspicion of murder or of suicide appears to have any just foundation. But there is no comparison between our law and that which existed amongst the Jews; so far superior was the solemnity of their proceedings; and so much more calculated to beget in the minds of men an abhorrence of the dreadful sin of murder.

But besides this more obvious end of the law, God designed also *to provide means for removing guilt from his land.* No sooner had the whole world sinned in Adam, than He devised means for their restoration to his favour through the incarnation and death of his only dear Son. And when "all flesh had corrupted their way before him," and determined him to execute vengeance upon them, he still waited to be gracious unto them, and sent them messages of mercy by the hands of Noah for the space of an hundred and twenty years. When the destruction of Nineveh was so imminent, that there remained but forty days before its completion, he sent them a prophet to warn them of their danger, and to bring them to repentance. Thus at all times has God been slow to anger, whilst the exercise of mercy was his delight. Now considering the wickedness of the human heart, it could not be but that sometimes murder had been committed: and he had declared that, in that case, "the land could not be cleansed from blood but by the blood of him that shed it." Yet, as it must sometimes happen that the criminal could not be discovered, here was a method provided for expiating the guilt, so that his judgments might not fall upon any in this world, but only on the criminal himself in the world to come. How amiable does God appear in this view! and how plainly may we see in this very ordinance that "judgment is a strange act," to which he is extremely averse; and that he is rich in mercy unto all them that call upon him!]

2. Its particular provisions—

[These deserve a minute attention. Some have thought that *the heifer which had not drawn in the yoke* represented the murderer, the son of Belial, who refused to bear the yoke of God's law; and that "*the rough valley* in which he was to be slain, denoted the worthlessness of the criminal's character, or the disagreeableness of the business[c]." But we apprehend that much more was designed by these particular appointments. The heifer that

[b] ver. 1—9. [c] See Scott, on the place.

that had *not drawn in the yoke* represented Christ, who, though he died under the curse of the law, had no previous obligation to do so, but did it voluntarily, giving himself freely for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour[d]. His death marked the utter excision which the murderer deserved; and *the rough valley* in which he was beheaded, marked the desolation, which the land itself merited for the transgression that had been committed[e]. Thus, the *victim*, the *death*, the *place*, all conspired to impress the minds of the beholders with the malignity of the offence, which required such a sacrifice; whilst the presence of the priests, which was especially required, (not to officiate themselves, but to overlook and direct the offices of others,) intimated the indispensable necessity of seeking pardon precisely in God's appointed way, and not in any method of their own devising[f]. To this sacrifice was to be added a public profession of their *personal* innocence, and, at the same time, a public acknowledgment of their *national* guilt: they must profess their innocence both by an appropriate sign, (*washing their hands over the slain heifer*,) and an express declaration; and they must acknowledge their guilt, with earnest supplications for mercy and forgiveness. Thus, namely, by their *protestations* and *petitions*, did they shew to all, that, as God would "not hear those who regarded iniquity in their hearts," so neither would he punish any, who should humble themselves before him in his appointed way. Truly, in this view, the ordinance, though merely judicial, was most interesting and most instructive.]

The mystical import of the ordinance being explained, we proceed,

II. To point out some lessons which may be learned from it—

We of course pass over those things which are less appropriate, and fix our attention upon those which seem to arise most naturally out of the subject before us.

We may learn then,

1. The importance of preventing or punishing sin—

[The concurrence of the elders and the priests in this ordinance shews, that Magistrates and Ministers should unite their efforts for the preservation of the public morals, and the averting of guilt from the land in which they dwell. To discourage, detect, and punish it, should be their constant endeavour; that the interests of society may not suffer, and that the honour of God may be maintained. The Magistrate ought "not to bear the

[d] Compare Numb. xix. 2. & Eph. v. 2.
[e] See Ps. cvii. 34. & Heb. vi. 8. [f] Deut. xvii. 8—12.

the sword in vain:" he should be "a terror to evil-doers, and a revenger to execute wrath upon them:" and though it does not comport so well with the ministerial office to be exercising civil authority, the Minister should be forward on every occasion to aid and stimulate to the utmost of his power those whom God has ordained to be his vicegerents upon earth — — — Were such a co-operation more common, the flagrant violations of the sabbath, and a thousand other enormities which are daily committed in our streets, would vanish at least from public view, and in a great measure be prevented.

But it is not only *public* sin which should be thus discountenanced; the crimes perpetrated in *secret*, and especially the hidden abominations of our own hearts, should be carefully investigated by us, and unreservedly suppressed. Every one should consider sin, of whatever kind it be, as that "abominable thing which God hateth:" and should remember, that, though it should never be detected and punished in this world, God will expose it in the world to come, and manifest his righteous indignation against all who commit it. Then at least, if not now, "our sin will find us out:" and therefore it becomes us now with all diligence to search and try ourselves, and to beg of God also to "search and try us, to see if there be any wicked way in us, and to lead us in the way everlasting."]

2. The comfort of a good conscience—

[The persons who were thus solemnly to assert their innocence in the presence of God, would doubtless feel happy that they were able to make their appeal to him in truth. To do so with respect to all sin, would be impossible, because "there is no man that liveth and sinneth not:" but with respect to allowed and indulged sin, we all ought to be able to call God to witness that we are free from it. We must be Israelites indeed, and without any allowed guile. And O! what a comfort is it when we can say with Job, "O God, thou knowest I am not wicked[g]!" Such was the comfort enjoyed by Paul; "Our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God we have had our conversation in the world[h]." When indeed we can make that appeal to God, we should do it with holy fear and jealousy, lest there should, after all, be some sin undiscovered by us. We should say with Paul, "Though I know nothing by myself, yet am I not hereby justified; but he that judgeth me is the Lord[i]." We may see in the instance of Pilate how awfully a man may deceive his own soul: he washed his hands before the multitude, and said, "I am free from the blood of this just person:" but his reluctance to commit sin could not excuse the actual commission of it; any more than the washing of his hands could

[g] Job x. 7. [h] 2 Cor. i. 12. [i] 1 Cor. iv. 4.

could cleanse his soul. Nevertheless we should labour to "keep a conscience void of offence," and so to have every evil disposition mortified, as to be able constantly to say with David, "I will wash my hands in innocency, O Lord, and so will I compass thine altar[k]."]

3. The efficacy of united faith and prayer—

[Great as the guilt of murder was, the Lord declared that it should not be imputed to the land, if this ordinance were duly complied with. And what sin is there that shall be imputed to us, if we look by faith to that great sacrifice which was once offered for sin, and implore mercy from God "as his *redeemed people?*" Not even murder itself should be excepted, if the forgiveness of it were diligently sought in this manner. Hear how David prayed, after the murder of Uriah: "Deliver me from blood-guiltiness, O God, thou God of my salvation; and my tongue shall sing aloud of thy righteousness! Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin! Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow[l]." O glorious truth! "Though our sins be as crimson, they may be made white as snow." Beloved Brethren, see your guilt as already irrevocably contracted: see the judgments of God hanging over you: see death ready to execute its commission, and the jaws of hell opening to swallow you up. And now turn your eyes to the "heifer slain in the rough valley," and averting from you the wrath of an offended God: in that heifer, see the Lord Jesus Christ, who has "redeemed you from the curse of the law, being made a curse for you." To you, even to you, that blessed Redeemer says, "Look unto me and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth!" O look to Him, plead with him, trust in him! and "he will in no wise cast you out." *This* is "the violence by which the kingdom of heaven is taken," even the violence of faith and prayer; and this force shall never be exerted in vain[m].

[k] Ps. xxvi. 6. [l] Ps. li. 2, 7, 14. [m] Matt. xi. 12.

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## CXLVIII.

### GRATITUDE TO GOD ENFORCED.

Deut. xxvi. 3—6. *And thou shalt go unto the priest that shall be in those days, and say unto him, I profess this day unto the Lord thy God, that I am come unto the country which the Lord sware unto our fathers for to give us. And the priest shall take the basket out of thine hand, and set it down before the altar of the Lord thy God. And thou shalt speak and say before the Lord thy God, A Syrian ready to perish was my father.*

THE

THE ceremonial law is considered in general as a system of burthensome rites, that had in themselves no intrinsic value, and were useful only as prefiguring the mysteries of the Gospel. But though this view of it is in a measure just, yet we may disparage that law too much; because there was in many of its ordinances a proper tendency to generate divine affections. In the law before us, certain professions were required to be made at the same time that the first-fruits were presented: and the words that were put into the mouths of the offerers, reminded them of the obligations which they owed to God, and, consequently, were suited to excite, as well as to express, their gratitude to God. As far as respected the deliverance of that people from Egypt, there is no further occasion for the law; and therefore it is superseded with the rest of the Jewish ritual: but as an intimation of the high value which God sets on grateful recollections, it is worthy of our highest regard.

We shall take occasion from it,

I. To point out our duty in reference to the mercies we have received—

We surely ought not to receive them like the brute beasts, which have no understanding: it is our duty to act as intelligent creatures; and to make the mercies of our God an occasion of augmented benefit to our souls. For this purpose we ought,

1. To review them frequently—

[Even *national* mercies ought not to be overlooked by us. It was to them in a peculiar manner that the ordinance before us had respect. The Jews were required not only to look back to the deliverance of their nation from Egypt, but to trace back their origin to Jacob their father, whose mother was a Syrian, who himself married two Syrian women, and himself lived in Syria for twenty years; whose children also, with the exception of Benjamin, were all born in Syria, and were the heads and progenitors of all the Jewish tribes. He on many occasions was near perishing: when he fled from the face of Esau, when he was followed by Laban his father-in-law, and when he was met again by Esau at the head of 400 men, he was in danger of being destroyed: in which case his children would either never have existed, or would all have been destroyed with him. But

God

God had preserved him from every danger, and brought his posterity to Canaan agreeably to his promise: and they in grateful remembrance of this were to profess it openly from year to year; "A Syrian ready to perish was our father."

Perhaps it rarely occurs to our minds that we have quite as much reason for gratitude on a national account as even the Jews themselves: but, if we call to mind the state of our forefathers, who were as ignorant of God as the most savage Indians, and remember, that we ourselves should have been bowing down to stocks and stones just like them, if the light of the Gospel had not been sent to dispel our darkness, we shall see that we may well adopt the language of our text and say, "A Syrian ready to perish was our father."

But we should be careful also to review our *personal* mercies. Let us look back to the weakness of infancy, the thoughtlessness of childhood, the folly of youth, and see how marvellously God has preserved us to the present hour, whilst millions have been cut off by a premature death, or left to protract a miserable existence in pain, or infamy, or want. The means by which we have been rescued from danger, and even the minutest occurrences that have contributed to our deliverance, are worthy of our most attentive survey, and must be distinctly viewed, if ever we would "understand aright the loving-kindness of the Lord." We must not however dwell solely, or even chiefly, on *temporal* mercies, but must raise our thoughts to those which are *spiritual*. What matter for reflection will *these* afford! If we consider the former blindness and ignorance of our minds, the hardness and depravity of our hearts, the indifference which we manifested towards the concerns of eternity, and the awful danger in which we stood, what reason have we to bless our God that he did not take us away in such a state! And, if we can say, as in our text, that "we are come unto the country which the Lord sware unto our fathers for to give us," and *are* "partakers of his promise in Christ Jesus," then have we indeed cause for thankfulness, even such cause, as we may well reflect upon to the latest hour of our lives——— On these then we should "muse till the fire burn, and we be constrained to speak of them with our tongues." In the ordinance before us a particular season was appointed for this exercise: and it is well to have seasons fixed upon in our own minds for a more solemn commemoration of the mercies received by us. If the commencement of the new year, for instance, or our birth-day, were regularly dedicated to this service, it could not be better spent. But, if our minds be duly impressed with a sense of God's goodness to us, we shall not be satisfied with allotting one particular period to the contemplation of it, but shall be glad to think and speak of it every day we live.]

2. To requite them gratefully—

[The Israelites were appointed to offer the first-fruits of the earth

earth to God, in token that they acknowledged him as the Proprietor and Giver of all that they possessed. Now it is not necessary that we should present the same specific offerings as they; but we must dedicate to God the *first-fruits* of *our time*, and the first-fruits of *our property*. We should fear the Lord in our youth, and not think it sufficient to give him the gleanings and the dregs of life — — — and we should "honour him with our substance, and with the *first-fruits* of all our increase;" "giving liberally, if we have much, and, if we have but little, doing our diligence gladly to give of that little." But chiefly should we consecrate *ourselves* to God: for we ourselves are, as the Apostle calls us, "a kind of *first-fruits* of God's creatures[a]." Our bodies and our souls, together with all their faculties and powers, are his: "We are not our own; we are bought with a price; and to honour him is our bounden duty." This is the very intent of God's mercies to us; nor do we ever requite them as we ought, till we "present ourselves to God as living sacrifices," and "glorify him with our bodies and our spirits which are his." This surrender of ourselves to him should be most solemn and devout. The image in our text admirably illustrates it: The priest took the basket that contained the first-fruits, and "*set it down before the altar of the Lord his God.*" Thus should we go into into the very presence of our God, and dedicate ourselves to him, as his peculiar people. Rather, if we may so speak, we should put ourselves into the hands of our great High Priest, that he may "present us holy and unblameable, and unreproveable in his sight."]

Such is obviously our duty. We proceed now,

II. To recommend it to your attention—

Persons in general are ready to defer the performance of this duty under an idea that it pertains not to them, at least not at present, and that an attention to it would deprive them of much happiness: but we must press upon your consciences the observance of it; for it is,

1. An universal duty—

[Who is there that has not received innumerable mercies for which he has reason to be thankful? Verily, marvellous as are the displays of God's goodness as recorded in the Scriptures, there is no man who might not find as wonderful records of it in his own life, if he could trace all the dispensations of Providence towards him, as clearly and minutely as they are marked in the inspired volume towards God's people of old — — —

But there is one point wherein all mankind are upon a level: we may all look back to the state of Adam after he had fallen, and

[a] Jam. i. 18.

and had reduced himself and all his posterity to ruin. How awful our condition then! Truly we should have been for ever like the fallen angels, destitute of all help or hope, if God had not marvellously interposed to rescue us from death and hell by the sacrifice of his only dear Son. With what emphasis then may every one of us say, "A Syrian ready to perish was our father!" Here all the wonders of redeeming love unfold themselves to our view——— and he who has no heart to adore God for them, has no evidence, no hope, of any interest in them———]

2. A reasonable duty—

[If we have conferred favours on any person for years together, do we not expect our kindness to be acknowledged and requited as opportunities shall occur? Do we not look with abhorrence upon a man that is insensible to all the obligations that can be heaped upon him? But what are the kindnesses which we can shew to a fellow-creature in comparison of those which we have received from God?——— Shall we then expect a tribute of gratitude from him, and think ourselves at liberty to withhold it from our heavenly Benefactor?——— Let the world ridicule devotion, if they will, and call the love of God enthusiasm: but we will maintain it, that "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom," and that an entire surrender of ourselves to him is "a reasonable service"——— Do we inquire, whence it is that ungodly men regard the sublimer exercises of religion as unnecessary and absurd? We answer, They have never considered what obligations they owe to God: only let them once become acquainted with "the height and depth and length and breadth of the love of Christ," and they will see, that reason, no less than revelation, demands of us this tribute; and that every enlightened mind must of necessity accord with that of the Psalmist, "What shall I render to the Lord for all the benefits he has done unto me?" "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me bless his holy name!"]

3. A delightful duty—

[In the passage before us it is associated with joy[b]: and indeed, what is such a service but a foretaste of heaven itself? Did any one ever engage in it, and not find his soul elevated by it to a joy which nothing else could afford? Let any one ruminate on earthly things, and his meditations will only augment his cares, or at best inspire him with a very transient joy. Let him dwell upon his own corruptions, and, though they are a proper subject of occasional meditation, they will only weigh down his spirits, and perhaps lead him to desponding fears. But let the goodness of God, and the wonders of redeeming love, be contemplated by him, and he will soon have his mind raised above

[b] ver. 11.

above earthly things, and fired with a holy ambition to honour and to resemble God. See how the Psalmist expresses his thoughts on such occasions[c]; what glorious language! how sublime must have been the feelings of his soul, when uttering it before God! Know ye then that this is the state to which we would invite you, and that the daily experience of it is the best preparative for the joys above.]

[c] Ps. cxlv. 1—7.

## CXLIX.

### COVENANTING WITH GOD EXPLAINED.

Deut. xxvi. 17—19. *Thou hast avouched the Lord this day to be thy God, and to walk in his ways, and to keep his statutes, and his commandments, and his judgments, and to hearken unto his voice: and the Lord hath avouched thee this day to be his peculiar people, as he hath promised thee, and that thou shouldest keep all his commandments; and to make thee high above all nations which he hath made, in praise, and in name, and in honour; and that thou mayest be an holy people unto the Lord thy God, as he hath spoken.*

THE covenant which was made with the Jews at Mount Horeb, though materially different from that which exists under the Christian dispensation, was yet intended to shadow forth that which all of us are called upon to enter into with our God. The Jewish covenant had respect in a great measure to temporal blessings, the bestowment of which was suspended entirely on their performance of certain conditions: whereas ours relates altogether to spiritual blessings; and though it has conditions as well as theirs, it provides strength for the performance of them, and thereby secures from failure all those who cordially embrace it. We may take occasion therefore from the words before us to consider,

I. Our covenant engagements—

The Jews were required to "avouch," or profess openly, their acceptance of God as their God, and their determination to obey his will in all things; and such are the engagements which we also are called to take upon ourselves under the Christian dispensation:

1. To

1. To accept God as our God—

[The Jews had most satisfactory evidence that Jehovah was the only true God, and that he alone was worthy to be worshipped and adored. But, great as were the evidences of his kindness towards them, they are nothing in comparison of the demonstrations of his love to us. The gift of his only dear Son to die for us must for ever eclipse every other expression of his love[a]: and this peculiarly distinguishes the view in which we are to accept him: we must regard him as our *incarnate* God, as "God IN *Christ Jesus*, reconciling the world unto himself, and not imputing their trespasses unto them." Think a moment what is implied in such an acceptance of God: it supposes, that we feel our guilty, helpless, and hopeless state by nature; that we see the suitableness and sufficiency of the provision which God has made for us in the Son of his love; and that we are determined to have no dependence on any thing but on the meritorious death and the all-sufficient grace of the Lord Jesus———

But it is not merely a secret determination which God requires: that determination must be *avowed*; we must "avouch" him to be the Lord *our* God. We must not be ashamed of Christ, but must "confess him before men," and be as bold in acknowledging him, as the ungodly are in their allegiance to the God of this world———]

2. To act towards him as becomes us in that relation—

[Universal obedience to his commands was promised by the Jews of old; and the same must be promised by us also. We need not attempt to discriminate between the various terms here used: *this* we are sure is intended by them, that we are to yield obedience to *the whole of his will* as far as we know it, neither regarding any thing as unworthy of our notice, nor any thing as too difficult for us to perform: we must "hearken to his voice," *as the angels in heaven do*[b], with an unwearied solicitude to know more of his will, and an incessant readiness to comply with the first intimations of it. We must be searching and meditating continually to find out what he speaks to us in his written word; and be listening also attentively to the still small voice of his Spirit, speaking to us in our consciences: and, whatever we ascertain to be his mind and will, that we are to do without hesitation, and without reserve.

Now *this* we must determine through grace to do. We must not come to God only as a *Saviour* to *deliver* us, but also as a *Lord* to *govern* us:-and we must resolve that henceforth "no other lord shall have dominion over us." Nor must this determination be kept secret: this also must be *avowed*: we must let it be seen "whose we are, and whom we serve;" and must evince a firmness

[a] Rom. v. 8. [b] Ps. ciii. 20.

ness in his service which neither the terrors nor allurements of the world can ever shake — — —]

Precisely corresponding with our engagements are,

II. Our covenant advantages—

God affords us ample encouragement to "lay hold on his covenant;" for he avows his determination,

1. To own us as his people—

[The very moment that we look to Christ as "all our salvation and all our desire," God will set his seal upon us as "his peculiar treasure." Just as a person who has bought any thing of great value, regards it from that moment as his own property, and uses all proper methods for the securing the full possession of it, so does God: "he sets apart him that is godly for himself:" he gives "his angels charge over him," and "*avouches*" him from that day to be "his purchased possession." He "*avouches*" it, I say, and makes it manifest both to the man himself and to the world around him. To the man himself he gives "a spirit of adoption, enabling him to cry, Abba, Father," and to ascertain, by "the witness of that Spirit, that he is a child of God[c]." To the world around him also he makes it manifest, by enabling him to "walk as Christ walked," and "to shine as a light in the midst of a dark benighted world." Instantly does the change in him become apparent, so that his friends and neighbours cannot but confess that he is a new creature: and, though some will ascribe the change to one thing, and some to another, they are constrained to acknowledge, that his new mode of life is such as they cannot attain to, and such as approves itself to be the very work of God himself.]

2. To bestow on us blessings worthy of that relation—

[The first thing which the child of God desires, is *holiness*: and behold, as soon as ever he embraces the Christian covenant, God engages to *make* him holy, and to *enable him* "to keep all his commandments." This is a peculiar point of difference between the Jewish covenant and ours, as we have already observed; and it is that which is our greatest encouragement under the consciousness we feel of our own weakness. God "will put his Spirit within us, and *cause us* to walk in his statutes &c.[d]" This is actually a part of HIS *covenant* engagements; and must be esteemed by us as our security for the enjoyment of all our other advantages.

Together with this does God undertake to give us the most exalted *honour and happiness*: "he will make us high above all people in praise, and in name, and in honour." Behold, says the Apostle,

[c] Rom. viii. 15, 16. [d] Ezek. xxxvi. 25—27.

Apostle, What manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called THE SONS OF GOD!" Yes, he "calls us not servants, but friends," yea, "sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty." For us has he prepared crowns and kingdoms, that we may "sit with him on his throne," and be partakers of his glory for ever and ever. This, and infinitely more than language can express, has "God prepared for them that love him," and that embrace "his covenant of life and peace:" and he pledges his truth and faithfulness for the performance of his word.

O Christian, what advantages are these! what tongue can ever utter them; what imagination can ever conceive of them aright? Know however, that, unspeakable as they are, they are all thy rightful portion, thine everlasting inheritance.]

APPLICATION—

Twice is the expression used, "*this day;*" "*this day* thou has avouched;" and "*this day* God has avouched, &c." Permit me then to ask, *Have you ever known* such a day as this, a day wherein you have solemnly surrendered yourselves to God as his redeemed people, with a full determination to serve him with your whole hearts; and a day wherein he has "manifested himself to you as he does not unto the world," and "sealed you with the Holy Spirit of promise, as the earnest of your inheritance?"

To those who have known such a day—

[Perhaps you were brought to it through many and severe afflictions[dd]; but have you ever regretted for a moment the means by which such a blessed end has been accomplished? We say then, Let not the remembrance of that day escape from your minds. You cannot but recollect what a solemn transaction it was between God and your own souls; what shame you felt that ever you had alienated yourselves from him, what gratitude to him for his gracious acceptance of you, what a determination to live entirely to his glory, and what a persuasion that you could never be base enough to forget the engagements of that day. But do you not find that the good impressions have been greatly weakened, and that, whilst the ardour of your will and affections has cooled, little remains except the convictions of your judgment? Ah! beware of "leaving your first love," or of resting satisfied with past experiences. Know that it is not on any one day that these transactions must be realized, but every day of your lives. You should be again and again renewing your vows unto the Lord, and be daily occupied in fulfilling

[dd] Zech. xiii. 9. Ezek. xx. 37.

filling them. Look to it then, that neither the cares of the world, nor the deceitfulness of riches, nor the lusts of the flesh, nor the fear of man, nor any other thing, "choke the good seed within you, or prevent your bringing forth fruit unto perfection."]

To those who wish for such a day,

[(For we trust that such there are amongst us, who yet cannot speak of such a day as past,) we would earnestly suggest some necessary cautions.

Delay not thus to give yourselves up to God: but be particularly on your guard not to do it in a legal, self-righteous, self-dependent spirit. There are two mistakes which are very generally made, which yet are of most fatal consequence: the *first* is, that our covenant engagements relate only to the performance of our duties; whereas they relate primarily to our acceptance of God as our reconciled God in Christ Jesus: and the *second* is, that we are to found all our hopes of covenant advantages on our own obedience; whereas we should regard them, not as purchased by us, but as bestowed on us in the covenant, and as secured to us in Christ Jesus. Happy would it be, if this matter were more clearly understood: it lies at the very root of all our comfort, and of all our stability: till we see all our holiness secured to us as well as required of us, we shall never rely as we ought on the promises of God, or give to him the glory due unto his name. See how the covenant is expressed by an inspired prophet: not only does it say, "They shall be my people, and I will be their God," but, to secure their part of the covenant as well as God's, God promises "not to turn away from them, or to suffer them to turn away from him[e]." Thus is "the covenant ordered in all things, and therefore sure:" but it is sure to those only who lay hold on it with a just apprehension of its nature, and a simple dependence on its provisions.]

Those who have no idea of any such day

[may probably be found amongst us. There are some who seem to take credit to themselves for never having made any profession of religion at all. But can they suppose that this is any excuse for their irreligion, or that it invalidates their obligation to serve the Lord? See the solemn injunction that precedes the text[f]: can they make that void? See what is the prophet's description of things under the Gospel dispensation[g]: there not only are the Lord's people represented as encouraging one another to covenant thus with God, but the state of their minds is accurately delineated, and the whole mode of their proceeding described. Be it known then that this is the duty of every one amongst us. If we would have God for our portion in a better world, we must accept him now: and, if we would be his people in

[e] Jer. xxxii. 38—41. [f] ver. 16. [g] Jer. l. 4, 5.

in a better world, we must give ourselves up to him now. To make excuses is vain. This duty is paramount to every other: and therefore we call upon all of you *this day* to "avouch God for your God," that he, in the day of judgment, may acknowledge you as his redeemed people.]

## CL.

### DANGER OF CARNAL SECURITY.

Deut. xxix. 19, 20. *And it come to pass, when he heareth the words of this curse, that he bless himself in his heart, saying, I shall have peace, though I walk in the imagination of mine heart, to add drunkenness to thirst: the Lord will not spare him; but then the anger of the Lord and his jealousy shall smoke against that man; and all the curses that are written in this book shall lie upon him; and the Lord shall blot out his name from under heaven.*

GOD has declared that he "desireth not the death of a sinner, but rather that he should turn from his wickedness and live:" and this is abundantly evident from the forbearance which he exercises towards sinners, and from the means he has used for their restoration to his favour. When he brought the Israelites out of Egypt, he entered into covenant with them on mount Horeb: and when that whole generation had perished in consequence of their violations of his covenant, he was graciously pleased to renew the covenant with their children in the land of Moab: and the reason he gives for that condescending kindness is, lest they should presumptously sin, and miserably perish, after the example of their fathers*.

In the words which we have just read, he intimates,

I. The astonishing delusion of sinners—

That the greatest part of mankind are walking after the imaginations of their own hearts, is evident; and that God denounces his vengeance against them, is equally evident: yet on every side we behold,

1. Their fearlessness—

[God speaks to them in the plainest terms, that "the soul that sinneth shall die," and that "the wicked shall be turned into

* See ver. 1, 15, 18—20.

into hell, even all the people that forget God." They themselves too cannot but acknowledge, that "the wrath of God is revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men." Yet they hear the denunciations of God's wrath with perfect indifference: they account them not worth the smallest consideration: yea, to use the expressive language of the Psalmist, "they puff at them[b]." 'What though they do "set at nought God's law, and walk rather after the imagination of their own hearts?" What though they do "add drunkenness to thirst," and "draw out sin as a cart-rope[c]," adding fresh materials continually, and drawing it out without any intermission to an indefinite length, will God regard such trifling matters? No: He does not see them, or deem them worthy of his notice[d]. He does indeed threaten to punish these things; but he will never execute his threatenings.' If any menace their temporal welfare, they are open enough to the impressions of fear, and anxious enough to escape the danger: but if God threaten them with his everlasting displeasure, they regard it as an empty sound. Thus do they cast off all fear of God, and treat both him and his word with the utmost contempt[e].]

2. Their self-complacency—

[They can see no evil in sin: they are sensible that they do not conform to God's law; (nor indeed have they any wish to do so;) but yet, though their actions are not correct, their hearts are good: they mean no harm: they do as they would be done by; and that, in their estimation, comprehends all that is required of them. It is truly astonishing to see how, in the midst of all their iniquities, men will "*bless themselves in their hearts*," as much as if there were nothing amiss in their conduct. They quite resent the idea of being sinners, and of deserving God's wrath and indignation: they conceive that they are very good sort of people (as the expression is), and deserving of God's favour. Thus it was with the Jews of old; "The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord are these[f]:" they thought that no expressions were too strong to characterize their goodness. And thus do sinners in this day boast of their goodness: yea, not only the moral and sober do so, but even the drunken, the sensual, the profane: all are ready to think themselves as good as they need to be, and to answer, like the youth in the Gospel, "What lack I yet?" So blinded are they by Satan, and hardened through the deceitfulness of their own hearts!]

3. Their confidence—

[They entertain no doubts or fears: they think that all go to heaven, and that they must of necessity be happy when they die.

[b] Ps. x. 5. [c] Isai. v. 18. [d] Ps. x. 11. & Job xxii. 13, 14.
[e] Ps. x. 13. [f] Jer. vii. 4.

die." "I shall have peace," is the bold assertion of every one amongst them; nor will they suffer the safety of their state to be once questioned. On some occasions perhaps a suspicion arises in their minds that it is not quite so well with them as they imagine; but in general they go on as assured of happiness as if all the promises of the Gospel were on their side. Nor is this only in the thoughtlessness of youth: their confidence increases with their age: and even in death they frequently retain it to such a degree as to feel no fear of death: and this delusion of theirs is considered by the survivors as an evidence of their final acceptance. Well does the prophet say of them, "A deceived heart hath turned them aside, so that they cannot deliver their souls, nor say, Is there not a lie in my right hand?"]

But God views them with other eyes, and denounces,

II. Their awful doom—

The terms in which this is declared are sufficient to alarm the most careless sinner. The wrath of God is here denounced against him. This must be his portion; and this doom is,

1. Infallibly certain—

[Sinners imagine that God cannot inflict punishment: they suppose that if not inconsistent with his justice, it would at least be contrary to his acknowledged goodness and benignity. They think that, when the time comes, he will relent, and spare them. But, in our text, he meets that error, and declares, "The Lord will not spare him." "I have spared him long enough," the Lord will say: "I bore with all his wickedness for many years:" "I waited long to be gracious to him:" "I called to him, but he would not hear; I intreated him, but he refused to hearken: and therefore he now may call, and I will not hear; I will even laugh at his calamity, and mock when his fear is come." Now God would "repent him of the evil which he has thought to bring" on any sinner: but how inflexible he will be in that day, the prophet has abundantly declared[s]. The sinner may "knock at the door which is shut against him, saying, Lord, Lord, open to me: but I will say, Depart from me, I never knew thee, thou worker of iniquity."]

2. Inexpressibly severe—

[What must it be to have "the anger and the jealousy of Almighty God" incensed, and so incensed, as to be, as it were, "smoking against us?" But, to form a just idea of the sinner's doom, we must take all the most terrific passages of the word

[s] Ezek. viii. 18. & xxiv. 14.

word of God, and contemplate all the images contained in them, and then conceive of all of them combined to fill up the measure of his misery. Oh, if we think of "that lake that burneth with fire and brimstone," "where the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched," where there is nothing but "weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth," and "the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever," what an idea does it all give us of the judgments that await the impenitent transgressors! Yet these, yea and "*all* the curses that are written in the sacred volume" from one end of it even to the other, shall come upon him, and shall "*lie* and abide upon him for ever and ever." Once, if he had sought for mercy through the Lord Jesus Christ, his name might have been "written in the book of life;" but now "God will blot out his name from under heaven," and it shall be found registered only with those of the devil and his angels.

We are well aware that these truths are unwelcome to the generality of men: but it is infinitely better to contemplate them *in time*, than to be left to experience them *in eternity*.]

Let us LEARN then from this subject,

1. To compassionate the ungodly world—

[Were we to see men in danger of perishing in the sea, the most hardened amongst us would be moved to compassion: why then do we not pity those who are ready every moment to sink into the flames of hell? That they themselves are not alarmed is rather the reason why *we* should feel the more alarmed; because their foot will infallibly "slide in due time," and "the wrath of God will come upon them to the uttermost." Let "our eyes then run down with tears for them," and "our head be a fountain of tears to weep for them day and night." Let our efforts too be exerted to awaken them to a timely care of their own souls.]

2. To be on our guard against being influenced by their advice—

[Those who see not their own danger will be equally secure respecting *us*[h], and will endeavour to lull *us* asleep by their confident assertions. But, if their presumption will not benefit themselves, it will assuredly not benefit us. The antediluvian world, and the inhabitants of Sodom, despised the warnings given them, and accounted them as idle tales: but the threatened judgments came at last, and the deceivers and deceived perished in one indiscriminate mass. So will it be at the end of the world[i]. Every tittle of God's word shall be fulfilled; and therefore let those who would draw you back to the world be disregarded by you[k]. "Let God be true, but every man a liar."]

3. To

[h] Ezek. xiii. 22. [i] 2 Pet. ii. 4—9. [k] Eph. v. 6.

3. To be thankful if God has made us to differ from them—

[What reason had Noah and Lot to be thankful that they were enabled to believe the Divine testimony! And truly, if we are enabled to come forth from an ungodly world, and to enter into the true ark, the Lord Jesus Christ, we have no less reason to be thankful than they. It is no less the fruit of God's sovereign grace, than was the mercy vouchsafed to them. Let us then be increasingly watchful against presumptuous confidence, and all the delusions of our own hearts; and, in an unreserved attention to all God's commands, let us "keep ourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life."]

## CLI.

### THE RESTORATION AND CONVERSION OF THE JEWS.

Deut. xxx. 4—6. *If any of thine be driven out unto the utmost parts of heaven, from thence will the Lord thy God gather thee, and from thence will he fetch thee: and the Lord thy God will bring thee into the land which thy fathers possessed, and thou shalt possess it; and he will do thee good, and multiply thee above thy fathers. And the Lord thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live.*

IN interpreting the holy Scriptures, it is common with many to dwell almost exclusively upon the literal or historical sense of them, and to confine their meaning to the persons to whom the different parts were immediately addressed, or of whom they spake. But this limits the use of the sacred volume in such a manner, as to render it of little service to us. By supposing that it related only to other persons and other times, we get rid of its authority, destroy its power over our conscience, and learn to set aside every doctrine which we do not choose to receive, and every precept which we do not choose to practise. But there is an opposite error, against which also we ought to be on our guard. Some are so intent on the spiritual sense of Scripture, as almost entirely to overlook the literal. But the primary meaning is often as replete with instruction as any that

that can be affixed to the words, and incomparably more satisfactory to a well-informed mind. For instance, if we should take occasion from our text to speak of the nature and effects of true conversion, in bringing us to God and renovating our souls, we might speak what was good and useful; but the primary sense of the passage leads us to another subject, which ought to be of equal importance in our eyes, namely, The Restoration and Conversion of the Jews.

In discoursing then on the words before us, we shall notice,

I. The events to which they relate:—

That which first demands our attention, is, The *restoration* of the Jews—

[Very much is spoken in the Prophets on this subject: and though the greatest part of their declarations respecting it may be considered as having received their accomplishment in the Return of the Jews from the Babylonish Captivity, there are some which evidently refer to a period yet future. The prophet Ezekiel associates it with their acknowledgment of one Prince, whom he calls David[a]. But there was not any prince after the Captivity to whom that name can with any propriety be applied in such a view; whereas the Lord Jesus Christ is often spoken of under that name: and therefore it is reasonable to conclude, that the restoration spoken of must take place after the establishment of Christianity in the world. Indeed so strong are the declarations of Scripture upon this subject, that an expectation of the event universally obtains throughout the Christian world. What the precise time will be, we cannot absolutely fix: but we believe that they will be gathered from all quarters of the earth, and possess again their own land, agreeably to the literal expressions of our text: and it is highly probable, that the time is not far distant. As for the objections arising from the difficulty of carrying such a measure into execution, or from the barrenness of the land of Canaan, they vanish the very moment we open the Scriptures, and see what God did for them in former times. If God has ordained it, every mountain will become a plain.]

Nearly connected with this is their *conversion* to Christianity—

[If we suppose a doubt to arise respecting the former, there exists not even a shadow of a doubt respecting this. The Apostle Paul represents it as assuredly determined in the divine counsels, and

[a] Ezek. xxxvii. 21—25.

and infallibly to be accomplished in due season. The people of God in every age may be regarded as one tree, of which Abraham may be considered as the root. The Jews after a time were broken off, as fruitless branches; and the Gentiles were grafted on their stock: and, when the appointed season shall arrive, God will again engraft the Jews upon their own stock, and make both of Jews and Gentiles one tree, that shall fill the whole earth. It is by this latter measure that God's designs of love and mercy to the Gentiles also shall be perfected: for the conversion of the Jews will awaken the attention of the unconverted Gentiles, and be the means of bringing in the fulness of the Gentiles[b] ———

The change that will be wrought upon them will not be merely outward, or consisting in speculative opinions; it will reach to their inmost souls; it will produce in them a circumcision of the heart, an utter abhorrence of all sin, and a fervent love to God, as their reconciled God in Christ Jesus: they will "love him," I say, "with all their heart, and with all their soul." True indeed it is that they are very far from this state of mind at present: but so were the murderers of the Lord Jesus on the day of Pentecost; and yet in one hour were converted unto God. So shall it be in the day of God's power; "a nation shall be born in a day;" "a little one shall become a thousand, and a small one a strong nation: the Lord will hasten it in his time."]

Such being the prophetic import of the words, let us proceed to notice,

II. The reflections which they naturally suggest—

The present dispersed state of the Jews from which they are in due time to be recovered, is a most instructive subject. We cannot but see,

1. What witnesses they are for God—

[The very person who brought them out of Egypt was inspired to foretell both their present dispersion, and their future restoration. The event has come to pass; and now for above 1700 years have this people been scattered over the face of the whole earth, and are preserved a distinct people in every place. The treatment they should meet with was most circumstantially foretold: the hardships they should undergo[c], the oppression they should endure[d], the contempt in which they should be held[e], the conviction which they themselves, in common with all mankind, should feel, that their sufferings were inflicted by God himself on account of their iniquities[f]; all, I say, was foretold; and all is come to pass: and they are living witnesses of the truth of God, and of the divine authority of that book which they profess to have

[b] Rom. xi. 12, 15, 23—29. [c] Deut. xxviii. 53—57.
[d] ib. ver. 29. [e] ib. ver. 37. [f] Deut. xxix. 21—28.

have been inspired by him. They may be even said to be witnesses also of the truth of Christianity, which is founded on the Jewish Scriptures, and is altogether the completion of them. What therefore God said to them in the days of old, may with yet augmented force be applied to them at this time, "Ye are my witnesses, that I am God[s]."]

2. What warnings they are to us—

[Who that sees the present state of the Jews, and compares it with the predictions concerning them, must not acknowledge that God abhorreth iniquity, and will surely punish it even in his most highly favoured people? Methinks the sight of a Jew should produce this reflection in every mind. The Jews, because they were descended from the loins of Abraham, and had been distinguished by God above all the nations upon earth, imagined themselves to be safe: but when they had filled up the measure of their iniquities in the murder of their Messiah, the wrath of God came upon them to the uttermost. Let not Christians therefore imagine that the name and profession of Christianity will screen them from the wrath of God. The sentence of exclusion from the heavenly Canaan is gone forth against all who reject the Lord Jesus Christ; and it will assuredly be executed upon them in due time: for "how shall they escape, if they neglect so great salvation?" Our inquiry must be, Not, Am I instructed in some particular tenets, or observant of some particular forms? but, Am I "circumcised in heart, so as to love the Lord Jesus Christ with all my heart, and with all my soul?" This is the point to be ascertained; for "if any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, he will be anathema, Maran-atha:" he will be accursed; and God himself will for ever inflict the curse upon him.]

3. What encouragement we have to seek their welfare—

[Notwithstanding God has given so many promises respecting them, the Christian world for many hundreds of years have scarcely thought them worthy of the smallest attention. Christians have been anxious for the welfare of heathens, and have sent Missionaries into every quarter of the world to instruct them: but for the Jews they have felt no interest whatever: they have left them to perish without so much as an attempt for their conversion. But what base ingratitude is this! To whom are we ourselves indebted for all our privileges, but to Jews? Who wrote, and preserved with such wonderful care, the Scriptures of the Old Testament? or who wrote the New Testament but Jews? Who died to redeem our souls from death and hell? a Jew. Who at this moment makes intercession for us at the right hand of God? a Jew. Who manages every thing in heaven and earth

[s] Isai. xliii. 12.

earth for our good, and is a fountain of all spiritual good to our souls? a Jew. Of whom were the whole primitive Church composed for the first six or seven years? Jews. Who went forth with their lives in their hands, to convert the Gentiles; and to whom are we indebted for all the light that we enjoy? they were Jews. Have we then no debt of gratitude to them? And have we not reason to blush when we reflect on the manner in which we have requited them? Blessed be God! there are at last some stirred up to seek their welfare[h]. Let us unite with heart and hand, to help forward the blessed work. From what we see of their blindness and obduracy, we are apt to despond: but "the Lord's hand is not shortened that it cannot save:" he can as easily engraft them in again upon their own stock, as he could engraft us upon it: and he has therefore engrafted us upon it, that we might exert ourselves in their favour, and be instrumental in restoring them to the blessings they have lost[i]. Let us at least do what we can, and leave the issue of our labours unto God.]

[h] In 1810. [i] Rom. xi. 30, 31.

## CLII.

### THE WAY OF SALVATION PLAIN AND EASY.

Deut. xxx. 11—14. *This commandment which I command thee this day, it is not hidden from thee, neither is it far off: it is not in heaven, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go up for us to heaven, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it? neither is it beyond the sea, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go over the sea for us, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it and do it? But the word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it.*

IT is a very prevalent idea in the world, that all people shall be saved by the law under which they live; so that Jews, Turks, and Heathens of every description have as good a prospect of salvation, as those who enjoy the light of the Gospel. But there has been only one way of salvation from the fall of Adam to the present moment. How far God may be pleased to extend mercy for Christ's sake to some who have not had an opportunity of hearing the Gospel, we cannot presume to say: but to those who have the Scriptures in their hands we are sure that there is no hope of acceptance, but through faith in the

the Lord Jesus Christ. This was the way of salvation revealed to Adam, confirmed to Abraham, and more fully opened in the Mosaic law. It was of this that Moses spake in the words before us: to elucidate which, we shall inquire,

I. What is the commandment here spoken of—

What it was may be seen by consulting,

1. The testimony of Moses himself—

[It was not the *moral* law that was given on Mount Sinaï, but "the covenant which the Lord commanded Moses to make with the children of Israel in the land of Moab, *beside the covenant which he made with them in Horeb*[a]." The law given on Mount Sinaï, of which Horeb was a part, was strictly a covenant of *works*: but that which was given in the land of Moab, was a covenant of *grace*. That on Mount Sinaï made no provision for the smallest transgression: it simply said, Do this, and live: but that in the land of Moab was accompanied with the sprinkling of the blood of sacrifices both on the altar and on the people[aa]; and intimated, that through the blood of the great sacrifice their iniquities, if truly repented of, might be forgiven. And this distinction is very carefully noticed in the Epistle to the Hebrews, where St. Paul, mentioning some particulars not related by Moses, declares, that by the covenant thus ratified remission of sins was provided for, and might be obtained by all who sought it in the appointed way.]

2. An inspired exposition of the passage[b]—

[St. Paul is expressly contrasting the nature of the two covenants: the law, he tells us, required perfect obedience, and said, "He that doeth these things shall live by them[c]." But the Gospel, that is, "the righteousness which is of faith, speaketh on this wise;" and then he quotes the words before us, and explains them as referring to the Gospel. Some have thought that he quoted these words only in a way of accommodation; but it is plain that he understood them as strictly applicable to his point. Speaking of the righteousness which is of faith, he says, "But what saith IT[cc]?" He then, quoting the very words of Moses, answers, "*The word* is nigh thee, even in thy mouth and in thy heart;" and then he adds, "*This is the word of faith which we preach.*" If then the Apostle was inspired by the Holy Ghost, the matter is clear; and the Gospel was the commandment of which Moses spake. And it is worthy of observation, that Christ and

[a] Deut. xxix. 1. [aa] Exod. xxiv. 3—8. [b] Rom. x. 5—10.
[c] Lev. xviii. 5. & Deut. xxvii. 26.
[cc] Some would rather substitute the word HE. But our translation is right. See Beza in loc.

and his Apostles speak of it under very similar terms. Our Lord says, "This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent:" by which he means, that it is the work *which God requires of us*[d]. St. Paul calls the Gospel, "*the law* of faith[e]." St. John says, "This is his commandment, that ye believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ[f]." And "*obeying* the Gospel" is the common term used for believing in Christ[g].]

3. The particular characters by which it is distinguished—

[Moses speaks of it as *plainly revealed*, and as *easily understood*. Now this representation accords with that dispensation of the Gospel which was given to the Jews: *they* had no necessity for any one to ascend up to heaven, or to go over the sea, to bring them information about the way of life; for God had already revealed it to them from heaven: he had shewn them by the *moral* law that they were all in a state of guilt and condemnation; and he had shewn them by the *ceremonial* law that they were to be saved by means of a sacrifice, which should in due time be offered. And though that revelation was *comparatively* obscure, yet any Jew with pious dispositions might understand it sufficiently to obtain salvation by it.

But these characters in the fullest sense agree with the Gospel as it is made known to us. We are not left to inquire whether there is a Saviour or not? whether Christ has come down from above? or whether he has been raised up again from the dead? We know that he *has* come into the world; that he *has* "died for our sins, and has risen again for our justification:" we know that he *has done* every thing that is necessary for our reconciliation with God, and *will do* every thing that can be necessary for the carrying on and perfecting the salvation of our souls. There is *no uncertainty* about any point that is of importance to us to know. *Nor* indeed is there *any difficulty* in understanding what he has revealed. All that is required, is, a simple, humble, teachable spirit; and to such an one, however ignorant he be in other respects, every part of the Gospel is clear. The humble Christian "has within himself the witness" of all the fundamental truths of the Gospel. What doubt can he have that he is a guilty and condemned creature; or that he needs an atonement for his sins, and a better righteousness than his own for his justification before God? What doubt can he have that he needs the influences of the Holy Spirit to renew him after the divine image, and to render him meet for heaven? "If the Gospel be hid from any, it is because the god of this world has blinded their eyes:" it is not the intricacy or obscurity of the Gospel that makes it unintelligible to them, but the simplicity and brightness

[d] John vi. 28, 29. [e] Rom. iii. 27. [f] 1 John iii. 23.
[g] Rom. x. 15. & xvi. 26. 2 Thess. i. 8. 1 Pet. iv. 17.

brightness of it: "they love darkness rather than light;" and complain of the Gospel, when the fault is only in themselves. As revealed *to* us, the Gospel is not obscure; but, as revealed *in* us, it is bright as the meridian sun.]

Such then "is the commandment which God commands us this day." We proceed to consider,

II. What is the obedience which it requires—

It demands from us,

1. An inward approbation of the heart—

[Without this all the knowledge of men or angels would be of little use. On this our salvation altogether depends. Moses says, "The word is in thy *heart*:" and St. Paul's exposition of it is, "If thou shalt believe in thine *heart* that God hath raised the Lord Jesus from the dead, thou shalt be saved." Thus a mere rational assent to divine truth is particularly excluded from the office of saving; and salvation is annexed to that faith only which calls forth all the affections of the soul, "a faith which worketh by love." As "a commandment," it is to have all the force of a law within us, "casting down imaginations with every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God," and "bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ." It is not sufficient that we acknowledge the death and resurrection of Christ as parts of our creed; we must see and feel the necessity of them in order to the deliverance of our souls from death and hell; and we must also glory in them, as the infinitely wise, gracious, and all-sufficient means of our redemption. We must have such a view of these truths, as makes us to "account all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of them[h]." This was insisted on as necessary to the admission of converts into the Christian Church. And it is the experience of all who truly belong to Christ[i].]

2. An outward confession of them with the mouth—

[It is curious to observe what minute attention the Apostle paid to the words of Moses, and what emphasis he has laid upon them. Moses had transiently observed, "The word is in thy mouth and in thy heart;" but the Apostle amplifies the idea, and shews *repeatedly* that the confessing of Christ with the *mouth* is quite as necesssary as the believing on him with the *heart:* by the latter indeed we obtain "righteousness;" but by the former we obtain complete "salvation[k]." In that age, to confess Christ before men was to subject oneself to persecutions and death in their most cruel forms: but our Lord would not acknowledge any one as his disciple, who should neglect to do it:

[h] Acts viii. 37. [i] Rom. vi. 17. [k] Rom. x. 9, 10.

it: he warned his Disciples that such cowardice would infallibly exclude them from the kingdom of heaven. How necessary then and indispensable must a confession of Christ in this age be, when we have nothing to fear but the loss of some temporal interest, and the being stigmatized with some ignominious name! Truly, if *we* are ashamed to confess him, we may well be banished from his presence as the weakest and most contemptible of the human race[l]. Let this then be considered by all who would secure the salvation of their souls; they must openly confess their attachment to Christ, and must "follow him without the camp bearing his reproach." A public acknowledging of him indeed will not supersede the necessity of internal piety; nor will the piety of the heart supersede the necessity of honouring Christ by an open profession of our faith: both are necessary in their place; and both must be combined by those who would derive any benefit from either.]

LEARN then from hence,

1. To value aright the privileges you enjoy—

[The Jews were far exalted above the heathen; but we are no less exalted above them: for we have the substance, of which they had only the shadow. But even among Christians also there is a great difference; some having the Gospel more fully and clearly opened to them than others. We pray God that the light which *you* enjoy may be improved by you; else it will leave you in a more deplorable state than Sodom and Gomorrah.]

2. To guard against entertaining discouraging thoughts about the salvation of your souls—

[Moses tells you that you have *no occasion* for such thoughts; and St. Paul *guards you against the admission of them* into your minds: "*Say not in thine heart*," who shall do such and such things for me? It is very common for persons to think their salvation on one account or other unattainable: but "what could God have done for us that he has not done?" or what provision do we need which he has not laid up in store for us? To say, 'This salvation is not for *me*,' is to contradict the Scriptures, and to "make God a liar." Repeatedly is it said, that "*whosoever* believeth in Christ, and *whosoever* shall call on his name, shall be saved." It matters not whether he be a Jew or a Gentile, a greater sinner or a less; for "God is rich unto *all* that call upon him," whatever guilt they may have contracted, or whatever discouragements they may labour under[m]. Put away then all unbelieving fears, and know, that, as the Gospel is revealed for the benefit of all, so it shall be effectual for all who believe and obey it.]

[l] Mark viii. 38. [m] Rom. x. 11—13.

## CLIII.

### THE GOSPEL CLEARLY CONTAINED IN THE OLD TESTAMENT *.

Deut. xxx. 11—14. *This commandment which I command thee this day, it is not hidden from thee, neither is it far off: it is not in heaven, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go up for us to heaven, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it and do it? neither is it beyond the sea, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go over the sea for us, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it and do it? But the word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it.*

THE Old Testament is a rich mine of spiritual knowledge, and reflects as much light upon the New Testament as itself receives from this fuller revelation of God's will. Each is necessary to the understanding of the other; in that is the model of the edifice, which, under the Christian dispensation, has been erected: and, if it were duly attended to, it would prove sufficient to convince the whole world, that Christianity is Judaism perfected and completed; perfected in all its types, and completed in all its prophecies. To this effect spake Moses in the words before us. "The commandment" which he mentions, is not to be understood, as many Jews imagine, of the law given upon mount Sinaï, but of another covenant which God entered into with his people in the land of Moab; and which was, in fact, the covenant of grace. It is by Moses himself distinguished from the covenant of works: (see chap. xxix. 1.) and that distinction is confirmed by the account which he gives of it elsewhere. The law, as published on Horeb or mount Sinaï, made no provision for the pardon of any sin whatever: it simply said, "Do this and thou shalt live:" but the covenant made afterwards in the land of Moab, was ratified with the blood of sacrifices; which blood was sprinkled upon the altar, the book, and all the people; (Exod. xxiv. 3—8.) and *therefore* sprinkled, that they might know how to seek the remission of their sins,

* The author's First Address to the Jews, at St. Catherine Cree, London. The preceding Skeleton on the same text was written many years before, for *Gentiles*: this in 1818, for *Jews*.

sins, as often as occasion for it should arise*. In this act the Gospel way of salvation was set before them; so that they needed not henceforth be looking for any one to come down from heaven, like Moses, or from the depths of the sea, like Jonah, to proclaim it, seeing that it was "very nigh unto them" already, even "in their mouth," which approved of the law, and "in their heart," which loved it.

The things which the Gospel more particularly inculcates, are, Repentance, Faith, and Obedience; and these are almost as clearly revealed in the Old Testament as in the New.

To shew this to the Jewish people is, I conceive, the very first step towards bringing them to Christianity. The Apostles, when preaching to the Jews, always appealed to the Old Testament in confirmation of all that they delivered: and I also, after their example, will endeavour to shew you, my Jewish Brethren, that your own Scriptures declare in the plainest terms,

1st. That you are guilty and condemned by the moral law.

The law is a perfect transcript of the mind and will of God; and it requires of every human being an obedience to all its commands. For one single transgression it utterly and eternally condemns us: nay more, it requires every individual to express his assent to this as true, and his approbation of it as right and good: "Cursed is he that confirmeth not all the words of this law to do them: and all the people shall say, Amen:" (Deut. xxvii. 26.) But of the impossibility of coming to God by the law, we have a most striking illustration in the conduct of your forefathers at the very time that the law was given: they were so terrified by all that they saw and heard, that they *repeatedly* declared, that, if the same scenes should pass again, "they should die:" they intreated that God would no more speak to them

* The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, who was so deeply conversant with the whole of the Mosaic law, refers to this very covenant in this precise point of view. Heb. ix. 19, 20.

them himself, but give them a Mediator, through whom they might receive his law in a mitigated form, and divested of those terrors which they were not able to endure. And of this request God expressed the highest approbation, saying, "They have well said all that they have spoken. O that there were such an heart in them!" (Deut. v. 22—29.) In this matter, dearly beloved, my heart responds to the wish of your Almighty Lawgiver, "O that there were in you such an heart! Could we but once see you thoroughly convinced of your guilt and condemnation by the law, we should have no fear of your speedily and thankfully embracing the salvation offered you in the Gospel. The great obstacle to your reception of the Gospel is, that instead of regarding the law as a ministration of death and of condemnation, you are looking for life from obedience to it. True it is that *temporal* blessings were promised to obedience: and that eternal blessings also were promised to those who should "*lay hold on God's covenant,*" and keep his commandments. But the covenant on which they were to lay hold, was that which had been made with their father Abraham; and which never was, nor could be, disannulled by the law. The law, as published on mount Sinai, was intended to shut them up to this covenant, by making known to them the impossibility of being saved in any other way than by the promised Seed. And, when once you understand and feel this, you will not be far from the kingdom of God.

This conviction would also prepare you for another lesson taught you by Moses, namely, (2.) That you must be saved altogether by an atoning sacrifice.

This was taught you throughout the whole ceremonial law: the daily and annual sacrifices proclaimed it to your whole nation. Nor was this merely taught in theory; it was required of every offender, whatever his sin might be, to bring his sacrifice, in order that it might be put to death in his stead, and deliver him from the condemnation which his sin had merited. Even for sins of ignorance

rance this was required; and the offender, whether he were a priest, or an elder, or a ruler, or one of the common people, was required to *put his hands on the head of his sacrifice*, and thus, by the most significant of all actions, to transfer to it his sins: (Lev. iv. 4, 15, 24, 29.) What an instructive ordinance was this! Yet was the ordinance of the scape-goat, if possible, still more instructive. On the great day of annual expiation, the high priest, after killing the goat on which the Lord's lot had fallen, was to put his hands on the head of the scape-goat, and to confess over him all the sins of all the children of Israel; and then the goat was led into the wilderness from before them all, never more to be seen; that so the removal of their sins might be made visible, as it were, to their bodily eyes. Lev. xvi. 20—22.

Yet, whilst this glorious truth was thus plainly declared, the insufficiency of the legal sacrifices, and the necessity of a better sacrifice, was proclaimed also. For these very sacrifices were to be repeated from year to year; which shewed, that the guilt expiated by them was not fully removed. Hence the very sacrifices were, in fact, no other than an annual remembrance of sins, not finally forgiven. In this light they were viewed by those of your forefathers whom you cannot but venerate, and whom I believe to have been inspired of God, the Apostles of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ[b].

The same thing was intimated by the very partial appointment of sacrifices. There were many sins, as adultery and murder, for which no sacrifice was appointed. Indeed, presumptuous sins, of whatever kind they were, if remission was to be obtained by sacrifices, could never be forgiven; because no sacrifice was appointed for them. Nor, in truth, was any man made perfect as pertaining to the conscience by any of the sacrifices; because every man had a secret suspicion at least, if not conviction, that the blood of bulls and of goats could never take away

[b] See the Epistle to the Hebrews, x. 1—4.

away sin[c]. Still, however, the great end was answered of directing the eyes of all to the appointed sacrifices, and through them to the Lord Jesus Christ, the great sacrifice, whose blood alone can cleanse from sin, and who is "a propitiation for the sins of the whole world."

Dear Brethren, it was to this better sacrifice that David looked, when, after the commission of adultery and murder, he prayed, "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow:" (Ps. li. 7.) Let your eyes be directed to the same sacrifice, even to your Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the prophet Isaiah says, "He was wounded for our transgressions:" and again, "The Lord hath laid on him the iniquities of us all." This is He whom your forefathers pierced, and nailed to the cross; and through whom thousands of those who crucified him, found peace with God: and, if you also could now be persuaded to look unto him for salvation, you would immediately experience the effect produced by the brazen serpent in the wilderness, and be healed every one of you. O that you would obey the direction given you in the writings of your own Prophets, "Look unto me and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth." You would no longer continue strangers to peace and joy; (for strangers ye must be to these divine sensations, whilst ye are condemned by the law, and ignorant of the way in which your guilt is to be removed:) on the contrary, your "peace should flow down a river," and, as "children of Zion, you should be joyful in your King."

But further, it is declared in your law, (3.) That all who are thus saved, must be holy in heart and life.

God, as you know, requires you to be "holy as he is holy;" and to be "a peculiar people unto him above all the people upon earth." And I the rather bring this to your minds, because you are ready to think that we wish to proselyte you to Christianity,

[c] See the Epistle to the Hebrews, x. 1—4.

tianity; that we may have to glory in such an accession to our cause. But I beg leave to assure you, that I would not move a finger to proselyte your whole nation to our religion, if I did not at the same time raise them to be better men, fitter to serve their God on earth, and fitter to enjoy him for ever in heaven. And this I intreat you to bear in mind. It is to the divine image that we wish to bring you, and to the full possession of that blessing promised to you by Jehovah himself; "I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean; from all your filthiness, and from all your idols will I cleanse you. And I will take away the heart of stone out of your flesh, and will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and to keep my judgments and do them." (Ezek. xxxvi. 25—27.) This is necessary for you, as it is also for us: nor have we ourselves any other rule of conduct than that which was prescribed to you in the ten commandments. The advantage we have in the New Testament is not that new things are revealed to us, but that the things originally revealed to you are made more clear and intelligible. Not that in your Scriptures there is any obscurity in relation to this matter: we may truly say, "It is not far off, nor is it hidden from you; but it is very nigh unto you, even in your hands and in your mouth: I pray God we may be able to add, as Moses did in my text, that it is "in your heart" also!

And now permit me to address a few words to you, MY JEWISH BRETHREN.

It is to your own Scriptures that I wish in the first instance to direct your attention: for you yourselves know that they testify of your Messiah, and are intended to direct you to him. It is greatly to be lamented, that they are not studied amongst you as they ought to be; and that your Rabbies for the most part pay more deference to the voluminous commentaries with which your Scriptures are obscured, than to the Scriptures themselves. But let

let it not be so with you. Begin to search the Scriptures for yourselves: search them as for hid treasures; and pray to God to give you his Holy Spirit, to instruct you, and to guide you into all truth. When you take the blessed book of God into your hands, lift up your heart to God, and say with David, "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law!" Then compare your Scriptures with ours, the Old Testament with the New; and mark how exactly they correspond with each other, even as the vessel with the mould, or the wax with the seal. Then I fear not but that you will soon acknowledge Him of whom the Law and the Prophets do speak, even Jesus of Nazareth, to be the true Messiah, the Saviour of the world. Yes; he whom you have hitherto rejected will become precious to your souls; and you will, in a far higher sense than you have ever yet been, become the children of Abraham, and the sons of God.

To the Christian part of this auditory I will also beg leave to address a few words.

You have seen that with care and labour I have endeavoured to establish the true import of my text from the writings of Moses himself. But, if I had been speaking to you only, I might have spared that trouble, having the text already explained to my hand by God himself. St. Paul tells us, that the commandment which was nigh to the Jews, was the Gospel itself, even that word of faith which declares, that whosoever with the heart believes in Christ, and with the mouth confesses him, shall assuredly be saved. (Rom. x. 5—13.) How thankful should we be for such a light! and having been favoured with it, shall we conceal it from our Jewish Brethren, from whom, under God, we have received it? What would you think of a man, who being stationed in a light-house for the purpose of warning ships in its vicinity to avoid some rocks, and of directing them into a safe harbour, should, when he saw a whole fleet approaching, conceal the lights, and leave the whole fleet to perish on the rocks; and, when called

to an account for his conduct, should say, "I did not think it right to create any alarm among the crews and their passengers?" Would you think his excuse valid? Would you approve of his pretended benevolence? Would you not rather be filled with indignation against him, and say, that the blood of all who perished should be required at his hands? Do not ye then act in a way, which, under other circumstances, you would so severely condemn: but as God has given you a light, improve it carefully for your Jewish Brethren. This is what their fathers did for you, when you were bowing down to stocks and stones. Do ye it then for them, if peradventure you may be the means of enlightening some amongst them, and of saving their souls alive.

At the same time remember, that St. Paul applies the passage unto you; and tells you from it, that you must believe in Christ with your hearts, and confess him openly with your mouths. The word is, in the strictest sense, "*very nigh* unto *you*:" read it then, and ponder it in your hearts, and treasure it up in your minds, and live upon it, and glory in it: so shall it be a light to your paths, and make you wise unto salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

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## CLIV.

### MOSES' ENCOURAGING ADDRESS TO ISRAEL.

Deut. xxxi. 6. *Be strong and of a good courage; fear not, nor be afraid of them: for the Lord thy God, he it is that doth go with thee; he will not fail thee, nor forsake thee.*

THE application of passages in the Old Testament to the Church at this time is thought by many to be an unwarrantable liberty, especially if those passages referred to any particular occasion, and still more if they primarily related to any particular individual. We are far from saying that great caution is not requisite on this head; but we feel no hesitation in affirming, that passages in the Old Testament, whether general or parti-

cular in their primary import, are applicable to the Church of God in all ages, as far as the situations and circumstances of the Church resemble that in former times: nay, we go further still, and affirm, that passages, which in their primary sense related only to temporal concerns, may fitly be applied at this time in a spiritual sense, as far as there exists a just analogy between the cases. We cannot have a stronger proof of this than in the words before us. They were first addressed by Moses *generally* to all Israel, when they were about to invade the land of Canaan. They were then addressed *particularly* to Joshua in the sight of all Israel[a]: and they were afterwards again addressed to Joshua by God himself[b]. Now it might be asked, Have *we* any right to apply these words to the Church at this time? and may any individual in the Church consider them as addressed personally and particularly to himself? We answer, Yes; he may; and moreover may found upon them precisely the same conclusions as Israel of old did. For this we have the authority of an inspired Apostle; who, having quoted the words in reference to the whole Christian Church, adds, "So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper; and I will not fear what man shall do unto me[c]." Thus then are we warranted to address the words to you in relation to that warfare which you are to maintain against all the enemies of your salvation: and this we will proceed to do.

Brethren, we suppose you now in the state of Israel when addressed by Moses. And if, like Moses, we knew that the superintendence of your spiritual concerns was speedily to be devolved to another, and that this was the last time that we should ever address you, we could not do better than amplify and expand his ideas, contained in the words before us.

You, Brethren, are about to engage in a most arduous warfare—

[The enemies of Israel were numerous and very powerful: they were men of gigantic stature, and they "dwelt in cities walled

[a] ver. 8, 23. [b] Josh. i. 5, 9. [c] Heb. xiii. 5, 6.

walled up to heaven." There were no less than "seven nations greater and mightier than Israel," and all these were confederate together for the defence of Canaan. But these were weak, in comparison of the Christian's enemies. You, Brethren, have to conflict with the world and all its vanities, the flesh and all its corruptions, the devil and all his wiles. There is not any thing you see around you, which is not armed for your destruction: nor is there any thing within you which does not watch for an opportunity to betray your soul, and to inflict on it the most deadly wounds. Yet these enemies, notwithstanding their number and power, are quite overlooked by St. Paul, and counted as nothing, in comparison of those mighty adversaries, the principalities and powers of hell[d]. Their inconceivable subtlety, their invisible combination, their pre-eminent strength, their inveterate malignity, together with the easiness of their access to us at all times, render them formidable beyond measure; insomuch that if you had not an Almighty Friend to espouse your cause, you might well sit down in despair.]

## In the prospect of this contest you are apt to indulge desponding thoughts—

[Forty years before, the Israelites had refused to encounter their enemies, from an apprehension that they were invincible: and it is probable that they were not without their fears at this time. And what is it that at the present day deters multitudes from engaging in the *spiritual* warfare? is it not a fear that they shall not succeed? When we tell them that they must overcome the world, and mortify the flesh, and resist the devil, they reply, that these things are impossible; and that it is in vain to make such an impracticable attempt[e]. Even those who have fought well on particular occasions, are apt to faint, when their trials press upon them with more than usual weight: David himself yielded to unbelieving fears[f], and exclaimed in his haste, "All men are liars[g]." Perhaps there is not one amongst us whose "hands have not sometimes hanged down, and his knees been weary, and his heart faint;" not one who has not needed, like St. Paul himself, some peculiar manifestations of God for his support[h].]

## But there is no real cause for discouragement to any of you—

[It is alleged perhaps, that your enemies are mighty; but "your Redeemer also is mighty;" and "if he be for you, who can be against you?" If it be your own weakness that depresses you, only view it in a right light, and the most consolatory considerations will spring from it: for "when you are weak, then are

[d] Eph. vi. 12. [e] Jer. xviii. 12. [f] Ps. lxxvii. 7—10.
[g] Ps. cxvi. 11. with lxxiii. 13. [h] Acts xxiii. 11.

are you strong;" and the more sensible you are of your own insufficiency for any good thing, the more will God magnify his own power towards you, and "perfect his own strength in your weakness." The peculiar appositeness of our text to all such cases is evident from the repeated application of it to persons under discouragement, and the blessed effects produced by it. We have already supposed the discouragement to arise from a view of duties impracticable, or of difficulties insurmountable: but, in the former case, David consoled Solomon[i], and, in the latter case, Hezekiah comforted the Jews[k], with the very address which we are now considering: a sure proof, that it contains a sufficient antidote against all disquieting fears, of whatever kind they be, and to whatever extent they may prevail.]

## God promises to his people his presence and aid—

[If he refused to go forth with you, you might well say with Moses, "If thy presence go not with us, carry us not up hence[l]." Even if he offered to send an angel with you, it would not be sufficient[m]. But he has promised to be with you himself, and to exercise all his glorious perfections in your behalf. As in the days of Joshua he sent his Son to be "the Captain of the Lord's host[n]," so has he given him to be "a Leader and Commander unto" *you*[o]: by whom he says to you at this hour, "Lo! I am with you alway, even to the end of the world." Having then *his* wisdom to guide you, *his* arm to strengthen you, *his* power to protect you, what ground can you have for discouragement? "If *he* be for you, who can be against you[p]."]

## Nor will he ever fail you or forsake you—

[There may be times and seasons when he may suffer you to be assaulted with more than usual violence; but he will never give you up into the hands of your enemy, or "suffer you to be tempted above your strength:" or if for gracious purposes he see fit to withdraw himself, it shall only be "for a little moment," that he may afterwards the more visibly shew himself in your deliverance. Respecting this he engages in the strongest manner; and refers us to the rainbow in the heavens as an infallible pledge of his faithfulness and truth[q]. Created helps may fail us; but our God never will[r]; and you may "be confident that, having begun a good work in you, he will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ[s]." The manner in which the Apostle quotes the words of our text, abundantly shews how assured he was that it should be fulfilled; for he uses no less than five negatives to express the idea with the utmost possible force, and then "*boldly*" draws the inference

[i] 1 Chron. xxviii. 20.
[k] 2 Chron. xxxii. 6—8.
[l] Exod. xxxiii. 15.
[m] ib. ver. 2.
[n] Josh. v. 13, 14.
[o] Isai. lv. 4.
[p] Rom. viii. 31.
[q] Isai. liv. 7—10.
[r] 2 Tim. iv. 16, 17.
[s] Phil. i. 6.

inference for us, that we have nothing to fear from our most inveterate enemies[t]."]

Let these considerations then inspire you with confidence and joy—

[Hear the animated exhortation which God himself gives you by the prophet Isaiah; "Fear thou not, for I am with thee; be not dismayed, for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness[u]." If you reply, that there are mountains of difficulty before you, and you but as a worm to contend with them; then says God, "Fear not, thou *worm* Jacob; behold, I will make thee a new sharp threshing instrument having teeth; thou shalt thresh the mountains, and beat them small, and shalt make the hills as chaff; thou shalt fan them, and the wind shall carry them away, and the whirlwind shall scatter them: and thou shalt rejoice in the Lord, and shalt glory in the Holy One of Israel[x]." "Who then art thou, that thou shouldest be afraid of a man that shall die, and the son of man that shall be as grass, and forgettest the Lord thy Maker[y]?" All that you have to do is, to wait upon your God; and then, in spite of all your apprehensions of failure, or even of occasional defeats, you shall rise superior to your enemies, and be triumphant over them at last[z]. I say then to you in the words of our great Captain, "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom[a]."]

Let the *captives of Satan* arise and assert their liberty—

[Behold the kingdom of heaven is before you, "that good land flowing with milk and honey;" will ye be content that your great Adversary shall rob you of it without a struggle? Know that there is armour provided for you; and that if you go forth against him clad with it, you cannot but conquer. O enlist under the banners of the Lord Jesus, and go forth in his strength! fight a good fight; quit yourselves like men; be strong; and be assured, your labour shall not be in vain in the Lord."]

Let *the timid* take courage, and return to the charge—

[Think not of your own weakness, but of the Lord's strength. Remember what he has done for his people in old time. Did not the walls of Jericho fall at the sound of rams' horns? Was not Midian vanquished by a few lamps and broken pitchers? Did not Goliath fall by a sling and a stone? Ah! know that your enemies shall be like them, if only you will take courage. "Resist the devil, and he shall flee from you." See

[t] Heb. xiii. 5, 6. [u] Isai. xli. 10. [x] ib. 14—16.
[y] Isai. li. 12, 13. [z] Isai. xl. 27—31. [a] Luke xii. 32.

See what Joshua did to the five confederate kings[b]: thus shall you also do in due season; for the true Joshua has promised that "he will bruise Satan under your feet shortly[c]."]

Let *the strong* remember in whom their strength is—

[Let not any think themselves so strong, but that they still need, even as Joshua himself did, a word of exhortation and encouragement. Be not self-confident even for a moment, lest God leave you to yourselves, and you "be crushed before a moth." Peter will remind you how weak you are, if not upheld by God; and what Satan can accomplish, if permitted to sift you as wheat. "Be not high-minded then, but fear:" yet fear not others, but yourselves only. Be weak *in* yourselves, and strong in the Lord; and then you may dismiss every other fear, and already begin the shout of victory.]

[b] Josh. x. 24, 25. [c] Rom. xvi. 20.

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## CLV.

### THE SONG OF MOSES A WITNESS AGAINST THE JEWS.

Deut. xxxi. 19. *Now therefore write ye this song for you, and teach it the children of Israel: put it in their mouths, that this song may be a witness for me against the children of Israel.*

IN order that Moses in his own person should exemplify the nature of that law which he had given, it was appointed of God that he should die for one offence, and not have the honour of leading the people of Israel into Canaan[a]. The time of his departure was now nigh at hand; and God said to him, "Behold, thy days approach that thou must die." Little remained for him to do. He had written the whole of his law, and had "delivered it unto the priests," that they might "put it in the side of the ark of the covenant of the Lord their God." But God would have a song composed, which could contain a brief summary of his dealings with his people, and which should be committed by them to memory, as "a witness for him against themselves." This song we now propose to consider: and we shall open to you,

I. Its

[a] This subject is opened in the 132d Skeleton.

I. Its subject-matter—

As being an epitome of all their past history, and of God's dispensations towards them to the end of time, its contents are various: they are,

1. Commemorative—

[It records God's sovereign mercy to that people in *the original designation of the land of Canaan to them*, even from the first distribution of mankind over the face of the earth. When the sons of Adam and of Noah multiplied in the earth, he so ordered and overruled their motions, that the descendants of wicked Canaan should occupy that land, and prepare it, as it were, for Israel; and that the Israelites should be just ready to possess it when the inhabitants should have filled up the measure of their iniquities, and become ripe for the execution of the curse of God upon them: "It was *in reference to* the children of Israel that the Most High divided to the nations their inheritance, and set the bounds of each peculiar people[b]."

*The manner also in which he had brought them to it* is particularly specified. He had brought them through a waste howling wilderness, where he had preserved them by an uninterrupted series of miracles, and had instructed them in the knowledge of his will, and had kept them as the apple of his eye, and had made them the objects of his tenderest solicitude, like the eagle fostering, instructing, and protecting her helpless offspring[c].

*The richness of the provision which he had made for them* is also described in animated and appropriate terms. The fertility of the land, the stores administered even by its barren rocks, the countless multitudes of its flocks and herds, together with the abundance of its produce in corn and wine, all are set forth, in order that the nation even to their latest posterity might know how to appreciate the goodness of God to them, and be suitably impressed with a sense of their unbounded obligations[d].]

2. Prophetic—

[God had before declared what the ultimate fate of that nation would be: but here he states it in a compendious way. He foretells both *their sins*, and *their punishment*. Notwithstanding all that he had done for them, they would soon forget him, and would stupidly worship the idols of the heathen, which had not been able to protect their own votaries. Thus would they entirely cast off their allegiance to him, and provoke him to execute upon them his heaviest judgments[e]. Even for their past abominations he would have cast them off, if he had not been apprehensive that their enemies would have exulted, and taken occasion

[b] Deut. xxxii. 8. [c] ib. ver. 10—12. [d] ib. ver. 13, 14.
[e] ib. ver. 15—20, 22—25.

occasion from it to harden themselves in their atheistical impiety. But by effecting his purposes in the first instance, and delaying his judgments to a future and distant period, he should cut off all occasion for such vain triumphs, and should display at once his mercy and forbearance, his power and justice, his holiness and truth[f].

The terms in which his judgments are predicted necessarily carry our minds forward to the times of the present dispersion. Awful as was their punishment in Babylon, it fell short of these menaces, which were only to receive their *full* accomplishment, when they should have filled up the measure of their iniquities in the murder of their Messiah. This is evident from that part of the song which is,]

3. Promissory—

[Fixed as was God's determination to inflict "vengeance" upon them "in due time," he revealed also his determination not to cast them off for ever, but in their lowest extremity to remember and restore them[ff]. He would indeed banish them from that good land, and admit the Gentiles into fellowship with him as his peculiar people in their stead: but, whilst he calls on "the Gentiles to rejoice" on this account, he calls on the Jews also to *participate* their joy: for though they should be long oppressed by cruel enemies, God would appear again for them, "avenging the blood of his servants, and rendering vengeance to his adversaries," and would again "be merciful unto his land, and to his once most highly-favoured people[g]."

These promises shall in due time be fulfilled: and we trust that the time for their accomplishment is not now far distant. "The root of Jesse now stands for an ensign to the nations;" and whilst "the Gentiles are seeking to it," we hope that God will speedily set it up also as an ensign to the Jews, and "assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth[h]."]

These things were comprehended in "*a song*, which was to be taught the children of Israel." We proceed to consider,

II. Its peculiar use—

It was "to be a witness *for* God *against* the children of Israel," and was for this end to be transmitted to their latest posterity. It was intended in this view,

1. To justify God—

[When God should have inflicted all these judgments upon his

[f] Deut. xxxii. 26, 27. [ff] ib. ver. 36.
[g] ib. ver. 43. with Rom. xv. 10. [h] Isai. xi. 10—12, 15, 16.

his people, they might be ready to reflect on him as variable in his purposes, and cruel in his dispensations. But he here tells them beforehand what he would do, and for what reason he would do it. The change that was to take place, would not be in him, but in them. The very change of his dispensations would prove to them the unchangeableness of his nature. It was for the wickedness of the Canaanites that he was about to cast them out: and for the same reason he would cast out the Israelites also, when they should have provoked him to anger, by sinning in a far more grievous manner, against clearer light and knowledge, and against infinitely greater obligations than they. Of this he forewarned them; and the fault, as well as misery, would be all their own. "His work is perfect: all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity; just and right is he[i]."]

2. To humble them—

[The Jews were at all times a stiff-necked people, "a perverse and crooked generation." The best period of their history was from the death of Moses to the death of Joshua: yet God testified respecting them even then, that they manifested all those evil dispositions, which in process of time would be matured, and grow up into an abundant harvest: "I know their imagination which they go about, even now, before I have brought them into the land which I sware[k]!" Hence every Jew must see, that as his forefathers were not put into possession of that land for their righteousness, so he, and all his whole nation, are banished from it for their iniquities. And oh, how humiliating the comparison between their present, and their former, state! once the glory of the whole world, and now "an astonishment, and a proverb, and a bye-word in every nation where they dwell." They need only repeat this song, and they have enough to shew them how low they are fallen, and enough to humble them in dust and ashes.]

3. To prepare them for his promised blessings—

[The promise of a future restoration would of itself be sufficient to stimulate their desires after it. But it is worthy of observation, that the very judgments which God here denounces against them are as strongly expressive of his gracious intentions towards them, and as encouraging to their minds, as the promise itself: "They have moved me to jealousy with that which is not God; they have provoked me to anger with their vanities: and I will move them to jealousy with them which are not a people; I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation[l]." Thus whilst he transferred the blessings of salvation to the Gentiles, he did it no less for the good of his own rebellious and apostate people the Jews, than for the Gentiles themselves; hoping

[i] Deut. xxxii. 4. [k] ib. xxxi. 21.
[l] ib. xxxii. 21. with Rom. x. 19.

hoping thereby to stir them up to seek a participation of those privileges, which, when exclusively enjoyed by them, they had despised[m]. This idea, the moment it shall enter into their minds, will afford them rich encouragement: and we are persuaded, that, if the Christian world evinced a just sense of the mercies they enjoy, and walked worthy of them, the Jews would soon be stirred up to seek those blessings, in the contempt of which they are hardened by Christians themselves.]

Let us LEARN then from hence,

1. To cultivate a knowledge of the holy Scriptures ourselves—

[To *us* also are they *a witness*, as they were to the Jews of old, and are at this day: only they testify *for God* and *against us* in a thousand-fold greater degree. Hear what our blessed Lord himself affirms: "Search the Scriptures; for they are they which *testify of me*." O what mysteries of love and mercy do the New-Testament Scriptures attest! the incarnation, the life, the death, the resurrection, the ascension of Jesus Christ; his supremacy over all things in heaven and earth; together with all the wonders of redeeming love; how loudly do they testify *for Christ*; and how awfully will they testify *against us*, if we neglect them! If God commanded that the Jews, "men, women and children, and the strangers within their gates, should at stated times be gathered together, to hear the *law*, and learn to fear the Lord and to do his commandments," and that every individual among them in all successive ages should learn this song; much more ought *we* to assemble ourselves together for public instruction, and to commit to memory select portions of Scripture, and to teach them diligently to our children, in order to obtain for ourselves, and to transmit to others, the knowledge of God's will as it is revealed to us in the *Gospel*[n]! We call upon all of you then to study the holy Scriptures in private; to teach them to your children and servants; to be useful, where you can, in reading them to your poorer neighbours, who through ignorance are unable to read them for themselves, or through sickness are incapacitated from attending the public ordinances. To be active also in the conducting of *Sunday Schools* is a service most beneficial to man, and most acceptable to God.]

2. To impart the knowledge of them to the Jewish nation—

[They, alas! have almost universally forgotten this song: but we have it in our hands, and profess to reverence it as the word of God. Ought we not then to concur with God in that which was his special design in transmitting it to us? Ought we not to use it as the means of conviction to the Jews; and as the means

[m] Rom. xi. 11—14. [n] Deut. xxxi. 12, 13.

means of consolation to them also? Ought we not to seek that they may be partakers of our joy, and be again engrafted on their own olive-tree? Yet, strange as it may appear, not only have mere nominal Christians neglected them, but even the godly themselves have for the most part overlooked them, as much as if they were in no danger, or as if their conversion were an hopeless attempt. But we need not occupy your time in proving the danger of their state: for if they were not perishing, why did Christ and his Apostles make such efforts to save them? Nor need we labour to prove their conversion practicable, when God has declared it to be certain. Let then our bowels of compassion yearn over them: let us grieve to see them perishing in the midst of mercy: let us unite our endeavours to draw their attention to the holy Scriptures, and to the Messiah, whom they have so long continued to reject. Let us constrain them to see what blessings they despise; what holiness and happiness we ourselves have derived from the Lord Jesus, and what they lose by not believing in him. In this way let us endeavour to provoke them to jealousy. Then may we hope to see the veil taken from their hearts, and to have them associated with us in adoring the once crucified Jesus, and in singing to all eternity "the song of Moses and the Lamb."]

## CLVI.

### THE CHARACTER OF JEHOVAH.

Deut. xxxii. 1—4. *Give ear, O ye heavens, and I will speak; and hear, O earth, the words of my mouth. My doctrine shall drop as the rain, my speech shall distil as the dew, as the small rain upon the tender herb, and as the showers upon the grass: because I will publish the name of the Lord: ascribe ye greatness unto our God. He is the Rock; his work is perfect; for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth, and without iniquity, just and right is he.*

IN this chapter is contained the song which Moses wrote for the conviction of the Jews in all future ages, especially in that period when they should have provoked God to scatter them over the face of the whole earth. Its general contents have been before considered[a]. At present we shall confine ourselves only to its exordium, in which Moses *addresses the whole creation*, and then *describes the character of the Creator*. An invocation of "the heavens and the earth

[a] See on Ch. xxxi. 19.

earth is not uncommon in the Scriptures: it is used in order to impress men with a deeper sense of the importance of the subject, and to convey an idea, that even the inanimate creation will rise up in judgment against the children of men, if they should disregard the voice of their Creator. After requesting their attention, he declares, that the whole tendency of his discourse, and especially of that part which exhibits the character of the Deity, is to comfort and enrich the souls of men. As the dew and rain descend gently and silently upon the earth, softening the parched ground, refreshing and invigorating the drooping plants, and administering nourishment to the whole vegetable creation, so was his word intended to administer blessings to mankind, quickening the most dead, softening the most obdurate, comforting the most disconsolate, and fertilizing the most barren, among them all.

We are aware that a directly opposite effect is in general ascribed to a faithful ministration of the word: it is in general supposed, that a Scriptural representation of the Divine character must of necessity alarm and terrify mankind: but, whatever effect it may produce on them that are determined to hold fast their sins, it cannot fail to comfort all whose minds are duly prepared to receive it, and to operate on their souls as rain upon the new-mown grass. This will appear, whilst we,

I. Illustrate the representation here given of the Deity—

The description which Moses gives of Jehovah is short, but comprehensive: it sets forth,

1. His personal Majesty—

[The term "Rock" is often used in reference to the Deity; and intimates to us both what he is *in himself*, and what he is *to us*. *In himself* he is the great unchangeable Jehovah; and *to his people* a safe and everlasting Refuge. Whether it be from the storms of temptation or the heat of persecution, he affords protection to all who flee unto him[b] — — — and, to those who build upon him, he is an immoveable foundation: nothing shall ever

[b] Isai. xxxii. 2.

ever shake them; nothing shall ever disappoint them of their hopes[c] — — —]

2. His providential government—

[Deep and mysterious are his ways, yet are they all ordered in perfect wisdom and goodness. In *the world*, in *the Church*, and *in our own individual cases*, there are many things which we cannot account for; yet if we imagine that any one of them could have been more wisely appointed, we only betray our own ignorance and presumption. We cannot tell why God confined the revelation of his will to one single family for so many ages, or why it is still known to so small a part of the world: but in due time God will make it evident that such a mode of dispensing mercy was most conducive to his own glory. When a persecution arose in the Church about Stephen, and the saints, driven from Jerusalem, were scattered over the face of the earth, it probably appeared to them an inexplicable dispensation: but the benefit of it soon appeared, because the banished Christians propagated the Gospel wherever they came[d]. And when Paul was confined in prison two years, it might be thought a most calamitous event: yet does he himself tell us, that it tended rather unto the furtherance of the Gospel[e]. Thus, in innumerable instances, we are ready to say, like Jacob, "All these things are against us;" when in fact they are "all working together for our good," and we are constrained after a season to acknowledge, that our greatest crosses were only blessings in disguise[f].]

3. His moral perfections—

[Justice, holiness, and truth are inseparable from the Deity; "He is a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he." The present state of things indeed does not afford us a just criterion whereby to judge of these perfections; because eternity is not open to our view: but the brightest display of them that can be exhibited to mortal eyes, is seen in the great work of Redemption: for God has determined not to *pardon any* of the human race (at least, not any to whom the light of revelation comes,) except in a way that shall magnify these perfections; nor will he *condemn any*, without making them witnesses for him, that he is holy, and just, and true. It is for this very end that he sent his only-begotten Son into the world: for, by bearing our sins in his own body on the tree, Jesus has made a complete satisfaction for the sins of the whole world, and opened a way for the exercise of mercy in perfect consistency with all the other attributes of the Deity. The true believer makes an open confession of this, and acknowledges, that all his hopes are founded on the sacrifice of Christ: the unbeliever experiences in his own person the weight of that justice, which he would not honour in the person of his surety: so that all in heaven, and all in

[c] Isai. xlv. 17. [d] Acts viii. 1, 4. [e] Phil. i. 12—14. [f] Ps. xcvii. 2.

in hell too, are constrained to say, "Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of Saints[g]."]

That we may make a practical use of the Divine character we shall,

II. Shew how to make it a source of comfort to the soul—

If the Deity is an object of terror to any, it must arise either from an erroneous idea of his character, or from an opposition of mind to it. In order then to derive comfort from it, we must,

1. Get a just and comprehensive view of the divine perfections—

[If, as is too often the case, we paint to ourselves a God all mercy, who will never vindicate the honour of his law, nor ever fulfil his threatenings against sin or sinners, we may allay our fears for the present, but we can never bring peace or comfort into the soul: for, as we have no foundation for such an idea of the Deity, we never can divest ourselves of the apprehension that we may be mistaken, and that we may find him at last such a Being as the Scriptures represent him. On the other hand, if we view nothing but his justice, he must of necessity appear terrible in our eyes, because we cannot but know that we are transgressors of his law. But if we regard him as he is set forth in his word, and particularly as he appears in the person of Christ, then do we find in him all that is great and good, yea all that our souls can wish for, or our necessities require — — —]

2. Get our own hearts suitably affected with them—

[Whilst the *Majesty* of God should fill us with holy awe, and his power make us fearful of incurring his displeasure, these exalted perfections should encourage an affiance in him, as an Almighty Helper, and an all-sufficient protector. His very *sovereignty* should lead us to apply to him for mercy, because he will be most glorified in shewing mercy to the chief of sinners. Of course, a view of his *love*, his *mercy*, and his *truth*, must inspire us with holy confidence, and dispel all the fears which conscious unworthiness must create: we should therefore contemplate them with unceasing care, as the grounds of our hope, and the sources of our eternal welfare. Nor is it of small moment to have our minds impressed with a sense of his wisdom and goodness in all his providential dealings. It is by *that* that we shall have our minds composed under all the most afflictive dispensations, and encouraged to expect a happy issue

[g] Rev. xv. 3.

issue out of the most calamitous events ——— In a word, the representations which God has given of himself will then be most delightful to us, when our hearts are most filled with humility and love.]

APPLICATION—

[" Hear now, O ye heavens! and give ear, O earth!" say whether these views of the Deity do not tend to the happiness of man? O that God would " shine into all our hearts, to give us the knowledge of his glory in the face of Jesus Christ!" then should our " meditation of him be sweet," and our fruits abound to the praise and glory of his grace.]

## CLVII.

### THE JEWS MOVED TO JEALOUSY BY THE GENTILES.

Deut. xxxii. 21. *They have moved me to jealousy with that which is not God; they have provoked me to anger with their vanities: and I will move them to jealousy with those which are not a people; I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation.*

" KNOWN unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world." Moses informs us, that, in the very first distribution of men over the face of the earth, God had an especial respect to those, who, at a remote period, should spring from the loins of Abraham; and that he assigned to the descendants of cursed Ham that portion of the globe which, in due time, should be delivered into the hands of Israel, cultivated in every respect, and fit for the accommodation and support of the Jewish nation: " When the Most High divided to the nations their inheritance, when he separated the sons of Adam, he set the bounds of the people according to (or, in reference to) the number of the children of Israel[a]. Yet at the very time when God carried this decree into execution, at the time when the nation of Israel were, by the discipline of forty years in the wilderness, brought to a state of faith and piety that was never equalled at any subsequent period of their history, even then, I say, did God foresee their declension from his ways, and inspire

[a] Deut. xxxii. 8.

inspire Moses to predict the wickedness which they would commit, and the chastisements which should be inflicted upon them on account of it: he even instructed Moses to record the whole beforehand in a song, which was, in all succeeding ages, to be committed to memory by the children of Israel, and to be a witness for God against them. It was probable that, when he should change his conduct towards them, they would reflect on *him* either as mutable in his purposes, or as unable to execute his promises towards them: but this song would completely vindicate him from all such aspersions, and be a standing proof to them, that their miseries were the result of their own incorrigible perverseness. "Now," says God, "write ye this song for you, and teach it the children of Israel: put it in their mouths, that this song may be *a witness for me against the children of Israel.* For when I shall have brought them into the land which I sware unto their fathers, that floweth with milk and honey; and they shall have eaten and filled themselves, and waxen fat; then will they turn unto other gods, and serve them, and provoke me, and break my covenant. And it shall come to pass, when many evils and troubles are befallen them, that this song shall testify against them as a witness; for it shall not be forgotten out of the mouths of their seed: for I know their imagination which they go about, even now, before I have brought them into the land which I sware[b]."

In this song are foretold the awful apostacies of the Jewish nation, together with all the judgments that would be inflicted on them, from that time even to the period of their future restoration.

The words which I have chosen for my text, contain the sum and substance of the whole: they specify the ground of God's displeasure against his people, and the way in which he would manifest that displeasure: and they particularly mark the correspondence which there should be between their

[b] Deut. xxxi. 19—24.

their sin and their punishment: "They have moved me to jealousy with that which is not God; they have provoked me to anger with their vanities: and I will move them to jealousy with those which are not a people; I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation."

In discoursing on these words, there are two things to be considered;

I. The import of this prophecy respecting the Jews;

II. The use to be made of it by us Gentiles.

I. The import of this prophecy—

The general facts relating to it are so well known, that it will not be necessary to enter very minutely into them. Every one knows how highly favoured a people the Jewish nation have been; how exalted and privileged above all other people upon earth. The manner also in which they requited the kindness of their God, is well known. We are not disposed to think that human nature is worse in them than in others: the reason that it appears so is, that God's conduct towards them, and theirs towards him, is all exhibited to view, and forms a contrast the most humiliating that can be imagined. On some particular occasions they seem to have been penetrated with a becoming sense of the mercies vouchsafed unto them; but these impressions were of very short duration: within the space of a few days only, they forgot that wonderful deliverance which had been wrought for them at the Red Sea; as it is said, "They remembered not the multitude of his mercies, but provoked him at the sea, even at the Red Sea." Every fresh difficulty, instead of leading them to God in earnest supplication and humble affiance, only irritated their rebellious spirits, and excited their murmurs against God and his servant Moses. Scarcely had three months elapsed, when, whilst God was graciously revealing to Moses that law

by which the people were to be governed, they actually cast off God; and, because Moses had protracted his stay in the holy mount beyond what they thought a reasonable time, they would wait for him no longer; but determined to have other gods in the place of Jehovah, and another guide in the place of Moses: "Up," said they to Aaron, "make us gods which shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him." Immediately "they made a golden calf (in imitation of the Egyptian Apis), and worshipped it, and sacrificed thereto, and said, These be thy gods, O Israel, which have brought thee up out of the land of Egypt." Thus early did they shew that propensity which was so fatal to them in after-ages. In process of time they degenerated so far as to adopt all the gods of the heathen for their gods; even those gods who could not protect their own votaries, did this rebellious people worship, in preference to Jehovah, who had done so great things for them: "they worshipped Ashtoreth, the goddess of the Zidonians, and Milcom, the abomination of the Ammonites, and Chemosh, the abomination of the Moabites;" yea, "they made their children to pass through the fire unto Moloch," and "sacrificed their sons and their daughters unto devils, and shed innocent blood, even the blood of their sons and of their daughters, whom they sacrificed unto the idols of Canaan, and the land was polluted with blood." Even in the very house of God itself did they place their idols; as though they were determined to provoke the Lord to jealousy beyond a possibility of endurance; nor were there any rites too base, too impure, or too sanguinary for them to practise in the worship of them. Many times did God punish them for these great iniquities, by delivering them into the hands of their enemies; and as often, in answer to their prayers, did he rescue them again from their oppressors. But at last, as he tells us by the prophet, he was even "broken with their whorish heart:" and, as they would persist in their idolatries notwith-

notwithstanding all the warnings which from time to time he had sent them by his Prophets, he was constrained to execute upon them the judgment threatened in our text.

This is the account given us by the inspired historian: "All the chief priests and the people transgressed very much, after all the abominations of the heathen, and polluted the house of the Lord, which he had hallowed in Jerusalem. And the Lord God of their fathers sent to them by his messengers, rising up betimes and sending; because he had compassion on his people, and on his dwelling-place. But they mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and misused his Prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against his people, till there was no remedy. Therefore he brought upon them the king of the Chaldees, who slew their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion upon young man or maiden, old man or him that stooped for age; he gave them all into his hand[c]."

In confirmation of this exposition of our text, the Jewish writers refer to a passage in the prophet Isaiah (xxiii. 13.) The Chaldeans were but very recently risen into power; for, many hundred years after the Jews were established in the land of Canaan, the very name of Babylon was not at all formidable to Israel, or perhaps scarcely known. It was originally owing to the Assyrians that Babylon was exalted into so great and powerful a state: as, says the prophet, in the passage referred to, "Behold, the land of the Chaldeans; this people was not till the Assyrian founded it for them that dwell in the wilderness: they set up the towers thereof, they raised up the palaces thereof." Now to be vanquished by such a people, and to be carried captive to such a place, appeared a peculiar degradation; which may be supposed to be in part an accomplishment of those words, "I will move them to jealousy with *them which are not a people*; I will provoke them to anger with *a foolish nation*."

But

[c] 2 Chron. xxxvi. 14—17.

But that there was to be a further accomplishment of those words, we cannot doubt. Indeed, the Jews themselves acknowledge, that their present dispersion through the world is a continuation of those very judgments which were denounced against them by Moses. Not only the learned amongst them acknowledge this, but, as Moses himself foretold, even the most ignorant of the Jews are well aware of it. Moses says, in Deut. xxxi. 17, 18. "My anger shall be kindled against them in that day, and I will forsake them, and I will hide my face from them, and they shall be devoured, and many evils and troubles shall befal them; so that they will say in that day, Are not these evils come upon us, because our God is not amongst us? And I will surely hide my face in that day for all the evils which they have wrought, in that they are turned unto other gods." Now "the Jews themselves (as Bishop Patrick observes) take notice that these words have been fulfilled by the many calamities which have befallen them since the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans. This appears from *Schebet Jehuda*, where *Solomon Virgæ* quotes this very verse, to prove that their present sufferings proceed not from nature, but from an angry God, more powerful than nature." (Sect. 13.)

The truth is, that this prophecy received but a very partial accomplishment at that time: for there were but two tribes sent to Babylon; the other ten were carried captive to Assyria. Now the idea of "provoking them to jealousy by those who were not a people," could have no place in reference to the ten tribes, because Assyria was an empire almost thirteen hundred years before Israel was conquered by them[d]; and to the other two tribes, provided they were to be carried captive at all, it could make but little difference whether the nation that subdued them was of greater or less antiquity. For the full accomplishment of the prophecy, therefore, we must undoubtedly look to the times subsequent to the destruction of Jerusalem by the the Romans.

And

[d] See Prideaux' Connection

And here is a matter for the consideration of every Jew, that wishes to form a correct judgment of the main point that is at issue between the Jews and Christians.

The miseries inflicted on the Jewish nation by the Romans, both in the siege of Jerusalem and in their subsequent dispersion throughout the world, have been incomparably more grievous than any that ever were inflicted on them by the Chaldeans. I would ask then of the Jew, What has been the cause of this severe chastisement? What has your nation done to provoke God in so extraordinary a degree? There must be some particular crime that they have committed: what is it? God is too righteous, and too merciful, to afflict them without a cause. I ask, Are any of your Rabbies able to assign an adequate reason for these severe judgments? Your former idolatries were punished in the Babylonish Captivity: and you repented of those sins; insomuch that from the time of your return to your own land, to the destruction of your nation by the Romans, you not only never relapsed into idolatry, but you withstood every attempt to ensnare or to compel you to it. Yet, as your sufferings since that period have been so heavy and protracted, it must be supposed that your fathers committed some crime of deeper die, or at least some that was of equal enormity with your former idolatries. I ask then again, What crime is it? for there is not one of you that will venture to say, that God punishes you without a cause. If you cannot tell me, I will tell you what that crime is: it is *the crucifying of your Messiah.* You know, and your Rabbies all know, that there was a very general expectation of your Messiah at the precise time that Jesus came into the world. You know that Jesus professed himself to be the Messiah: you know also that he wrought innumerable miracles in confirmation of his claim: you know that he appealed to Moses and the Prophets as bearing witness of him: you know that he foretold all that he should suffer; and shewed, that in all those sufferings the

prophecies

prophecies concerning him would be fulfilled: you know also, that the crucifying of him was a national act, in which all ranks and orders of your countrymen concurred; and that when Pilate wished to free himself from the guilt of shedding innocent blood, they all cried; "His blood be on us, and *on our children!*" You know, moreover, that Jesus foretold the destruction of your city and nation by the Romans, together with your present desolate condition, *as the punishment that should be inflicted on you for your murder of him:* nay more, that these things should befal your nation before that generation should pass away. You know also, that, agreeably to his predictions, they did come to pass about forty years after his death, and that these judgments have been upon you from that time to the present hour. If you say, that only two of the tribes were thus guilty of putting him to death; I answer, that every Jew in the universe approves and applauds that act; and that therefore the judgments are inflicted on them all, and will continue to be inflicted, till they repent of it. All preceding judgments were removed, when your fathers repented of the crimes on account of which they had been inflicted: and the reason that your present judgments are not removed, is, that your enmity against the Lord Jesus is at this hour as strong as ever; and, if he were to put himself in your power again, you would conspire against him as before, and crucify him again. Yet, if *He* was not *the Messiah, your Messiah* is not come; and, consequently, those prophecies in your inspired volume which foretold his advent at that time, are falsified. Your Messiah was to come before the sceptre should finally depart from Judah, and while the second temple was yet standing, and about the time that the seventy weeks of Daniel should expire: but the sceptre *is* departed, and the temple *is* destroyed; and Daniel's weeks *are* expired; and at least seventeen hundred years have elapsed, since the period fixed by these prophecies for his appearance. It is evident therefore that all these prophecies have failed

failed of their accomplishment, if your Messiah is not yet come. As for saying, that the coming of the Messiah was deferred by God for the wickedness of your nation, what proof have you of it? Where has God threatened *that*, as a consequence of your wickedness? No: your Messiah is come; and has been treated in the manner which your own prophecies foretold, and as Jesus himself foretold: and though you, like your forefathers, in order to set aside the testimony of his resurrection, have recourse to that self-destructive falsehood of his being taken away by his own Disciples, whilst a whole guard of Roman soldiers were asleep, you know that his Disciples did at the very next festival, on the day of Pentecost, attest that he *was* risen, and attest it too in the very presence of the people who had put him to death, no less than three thousand of whom were converted to him on that very day: you know too, that in a short time myriads of Jews believed in Jesus; and that his Gospel continued to prevail throughout the known world, till the judgments threatened against your nation for destroying their Messiah came upon them.

Now by this act, the crucifying of your Messiah, you did *provoke God to jealousy* to a greater degree than by any of your former crimes: for God sent you his co-equal, co-eternal Son: he sent you that divine person, who was "David's Lord," as well "David's Son." The learned men of his own day acknowledged that the names, Son of man, and Son of God, were of the same import; and that, as assumed by Jesus, both the one and the other amounted to an assertion, that he was equal with God. You know also that his claiming these titles was the ground on which they accused him of blasphemy, and demanded sentence against him as a blasphemer. Thus according to your own acknowledgment, supposing him to have been the person foretold by the Prophets as the Messiah, you have "crucified *the Lord of Glory*." Moreover, about the time that your fathers crucified him, they were ready to follow every impostor

postor that assumed to himself the title of Messiah. "Gamaliel, a member of the Sanhedrim, a doctor of law, a man who was in high repute among all the Jews," acknowledged this readiness of the people to run after impostors: he mentions a person by the name of Theudas, who, with four hundred adherents, was slain: and after him one Judas of Galilee, who drew away much people after him, and perished[e]. We are informed also that Simon Magus, by his enchantments, seduced all the people of Samaria, from the least to the greatest, and persuaded them that "He was the great power of God[f]." Your own historian[g] bears ample testimony to these facts. Here then you can see how you have provoked God to jealousy, in that you have destroyed his own Son, who came down from heaven to instruct and save you: yea, though he brought with him the most unquestionable credentials, and supported his claim by the most satisfactory evidences, you rejected him with all imaginable contempt, whilst you readily adhered to any vile impostor that chose to arrogate to himself the title of Messiah. Your former idolatries, though sinful in the extreme, were less heinous than this, inasmuch as the manifestations of God's love were far brighter in the gift of his Son, than in all the other dispensations of his grace from the foundation of the world; and the opposition of your fathers to him was attended with aggravations, such as never did, or could, exist in any other crime that ever was committed.

Here then we are arrived at the true reason of the judgments which are at this time inflicted on you.

Now let us investigate the judgments themselves; and you will see that they also are such as were evidently predicted in our text.

You are cut off from being the people of the Lord, and are absolutely incapacitated for serving him in the way of his appointments. On the other hand, God has chosen to himself a people from among the Gentiles, from "those who were not a people," and were justly considered by you as "a foolish nation," because

[e] Acts v. 34—37. [f] Acts viii. 9—11. [g] Josephus, lib. vi. cap. 5.

because they were altogether without light and understanding as it respected God and his ways. This you know to have been predicted by all your Prophets, insomuch that your fathers, who looked for a temporal Messiah, expected that he would bring the Gentiles into subjection to himself, and extend his empire over the face of the whole earth. *This* the Lord Jesus has done: he has taken a people from among the Gentiles, who are become his willing subjects. Now this rejection of the Jews from the Church of God, and this gathering of a Church from among the Gentiles, is the very thing which in all ages has most angered you, and provoked you to jealousy. When Jesus himself merely brought to the remembrance of your fathers, that God had, in the days of Elijah and Elisha, shewn distinguished mercy to a Sidonian widow, and Naaman the Syrian; they were filled with such indignation, that, notwithstanding they greatly admired all the former part of his discourse, they would have instantly cast him down a precipice, if he had not escaped from their hands[h]. When, on another occasion, he spoke a parable to the chief priests and elders, and asked them "what they conceived the lord of the vineyard would do to those husbandmen who beat all his servants, and then murdered his Son in order to retain for themselves the possession of his inheritance, they were constrained to acknowledge, that he would destroy those murderers, and let his vineyard to others who should render him the fruits in their season:" and on his confirming this melancholy truth with respect to them, they exclaimed, "God forbid!" When the Apostles of Jesus afterwards preached to the Gentiles, the Jews could not contain themselves; the very mention of the name Gentiles, irritated them to madness[k]: so indignant were they at the thought of having their privileges transferred to others, whom they so despised. And thus it has been ever since. Nothing is so offensive to a Jew at this day, as the idea

[h] Luke iv. 22—30. [i] Matt. xxi. 33—41. & Luke xx. 14—16.
[j] Acts xiii. 44, 45. 1 Thess. ii. 15, 16. [k] Acts xxiii. 21, 22.

idea of Christians arrogating to themselves the title of *God's peculiar people.* The present attempts to bring the Jews into the Church of Christ are most displeasing to them: they regard us as modern Balaams, rising up to bring a curse upon their nation: and when any are converted from among them to the faith of Christ, the old enmity still rises in the hearts of their unbelieving brethren; who are kept only by the powerful arm of our law from manifesting their displeasure, as they were wont to do in the days of old.

Here then you see the text fulfilled in its utmost extent: here also you see that perfect correspondence between the guilt and the punishment of the Jewish nation, which was predicted: they have provoked God to jealousy by following vile impostors and rejecting his Son; and he has provoked them to jealousy by rejecting them, and receiving into his Church the ignorant and despised Gentiles.

And now let me ask, Is this exposition of the text novel? No: it is that which is sanctioned by your own Prophets, supported by our Apostles, and confirmed by actual experience.

Look at the Prophets: do they not declare the call of the Gentiles into the Church, saying, "In that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an Ensign of the people; to it shall the *Gentiles* seek, and His rest shall be glorious[l]." The prophet Hosea's language, though primarily applicable to the ten tribes, is certainly to be understood in reference to the Gentiles also: "I will have mercy on her that hath not obtained mercy; and I will say to them which were not my people, Thou art my people: and they shall say, Thou art my God[m]." And again, "It shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people, there it shall be said unto them, Ye are the sons of the Living God[n]." But the prophet Isaiah points directly to the Gentiles, when he says, "I am sought of them that asked not for me, I am found of them that sought me

[l] Isa. xi. 10. [m] Hos. ii. 23. [n] Hos. i. 10. with Rom. ix. 24—26.

me not: I said, behold me, behold me, unto *a nation that was not called by my name:*" I say he points to the Gentiles there; for he immediately contrasts with them the state of his own people, saying, "I have spread out my hands all the day unto a rebellious people, which walketh in a way that is not good, after their own thoughts[o]." If you turn to the New Testament, you will find there the very words of our text quoted, not merely to prove that the Gentiles were to be brought into the Church of God, but *that Israel was apprised of God's intentions*, and that, however averse they were to that measure, they could not but know that Moses himself had taught them to expect it: I say, *did not Israel know?* says the Apostle:—did they not know that "there was to be no difference between the Jew and the Greek; and that the same Lord is rich unto all that call upon him?" Yes; *for Moses saith, I will provoke you to jealousy by them that are no people, and by a foolish nation I will anger you*[p]. If we look to matter of fact, we find that there are, in every quarter of the globe, thousands and millions of Gentiles who are serving and honouring Jehovah, precisely as Abraham himself did: they are believing in the same God, and walking in the same steps: and the only difference between him and them is, that *he* looked to that blessed seed of his who *should come*; and *they* look to that blessed seed of his who *has come*, even Jesus, in whom *all the nations of the earth are blessed.*

It is time that we now inquire,

II. What use is to be made of this prophecy by us Gentiles?

If ever there was a dispensation calculated to instruct mankind, it is that which is predicted in the words before us. I will mention three lessons in particular which it ought to teach us: and the Lord grant, that they may be engraven in all our hearts!

First, it should lead us *to adore the mysterious providence of God.* Let us take a view of God's dealings with

[o] Isa. lxv. 1, 2. with Rom. x. 20, 21. [p] Rom. x. 19.

with that peculiar people, the Jews. When the whole earth was lying in gross darkness, he was pleased to choose Abraham out of an idolatrous nation and family, and to reveal himself to him. To him he promised a seed, whom he would take as a peculiar people above all the people upon earth. These descendants he promised to multiply as the stars of heaven, and as the sands upon the sea shore; and in due time to give them the land of Canaan for their inheritance. After he had in a most wonderful manner fulfilled all his promises to them, they rebelled against *him*, and served other gods, and provoked him to bring upon them many successive troubles, and at last to send them into captivity in Babylon. But during this whole time he still consulted their best interests; and even in the last and heaviest of these judgments, "he sent them into Babylon *for their good*[q]." Afflictive as that dispensation was, it was the most profitable to them of all the mercies and judgments that they ever experienced; for by means of it they were cured of their idolatrous propensities; and never have yielded to them any more, even to the present hour.

After seventy years God delivered them from thence also, as he had before delivered them from Egypt; and re-established them, to a certain degree, in their former prosperity. In the fulness of time, he, according to his promise, sent them his only-begotten Son, to establish among them that kingdom of righteousness and peace, which had been shadowed forth among them from the time that they became a nation. But on their destroying *him*, he determined to cast them off; and accordingly he gave them into the hands of the Romans, who executed upon them such judgments as never had been inflicted on any nation under heaven. But neither was this dispensation unmixed with mercy: for, blinded as they were by prejudice, they never would have renounced their errors, or embraced the Gospel, if they had been able still to satisfy their minds

[q] Jer. xxiv. 5.

minds with the rites and ceremonies of their own Church. But as God drove our first parents from Paradise, and precluded them from all access to the tree of life, which was no more to be a sacramental pledge of life to them now in their fallen state; and as he thereby prevented them from deluding their souls with false hopes, and shut them up unto that mercy, which he had revealed to them through the seed of the woman; so now has he cut off the Jews from all possibility of observing the rites and ceremonies of the Mosaic law, in order that they may be constrained to seek for mercy through the Messiah whom they have crucified.

At the same time that God has ordered this dispensation with an ultimate view to the good of his once-favoured people, he has consulted in it the good of the whole world; for, when he cut them off from the stock on which they grew, he took a people from among the Gentiles, and engrafted them as cions upon the Jewish stock, and made them "partakers of the root and fatness of the olive-tree" which his own right hand had planted. What he might have done for the Gentiles, if the Jews had not provoked him to cut them off, we cannot say: but the Apostle, speaking on this subject, says, that "they became enemies *for our sakes*," and "were broken off *that we might be grafted in*." Doubtless, the stock was sufficient to bear both them and us; for the time is coming when the whole world, Jews and Gentiles, shall grow together upon it, seeing that it is God's intention to engraft on it again the natural branches, which for the present he has broken off: but so has he ordained, that they should be cast out of his Church, and we be introduced into it, and that the one event should be preparatory to the other; that so the fall and ruin of the Jews should be the riches and salvation of the Gentile world[r]. And it is plain, that this appointment of his is carried into effect; for they are broken off, and are no longer

[r] Rom. xi. 11, 12, 15.

longer his Church, since there is not one amongst them that either does, or can, serve God according to their law: and we, on the contrary, are his Church; and millions of us, through the world, are rendering to him the service he requires; and, if we are not his Church, then God has not at this hour, nor has he had for above seventeen hundred years, a Church upon earth. God, however, has not cast off his people fully or finally: not fully, for he brought multitudes of them into his Church in the Apostolic age: nor finally; for though, through the shameful remissness of the Christian world, he has done but little for the Jews in these latter ages; yet is he, we trust, shewing mercy to them now, and sowing seeds among them, which shall one day bring forth a glorious harvest. Moreover as, by breaking off the Jews, God made room for the Gentiles, so has he ordained, that the bringing in the fulness of the Gentiles shall contribute to the restoration of the Jews themselves; and that, at last, the whole collective body of mankind shall be "one fold under one shepherd." What a stupendous mystery is this! Well might St. Paul, in the contemplation of it, exclaim, "O the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!" Truly, this mystery is by no means sufficiently considered amongst us; though it is so great, that not even the Apostles themselves, for six years after the day of Pentecost, could see into it; and even then it was only by a miraculous interference that God prevailed upon them to receive it: it was by repeated visions to Peter and Cornelius, that he induced Peter to preach the Gospel to Cornelius; and it was by the effusion of the Holy Ghost on Cornelius and his family, that he induced the other Apostles to acquiesce in what Peter had done: and, even to the last, it was with reluctance they confessed, "Then hath God to the Gentiles also granted repentance

repentance unto life[s]." Let me recommend you then, my Brethren, to turn your attention to this mystery more than you have ever yet done; and never imagine that you have attained just views of it, till you are transported with wonder at the wisdom displayed in it[t], and filled with gratitude for the mercies it conveys.

A second improvement we should make of this subject is, *to be afraid of provoking God to jealousy against us also.* We have seen that it was the idolatry of the Jews that chiefly provoked God to jealousy against them. But is there not a spiritual idolatry, as well as that which consisted in the worship of graven images? and is it not equally offensive to a jealous God? When his people of old placed idols in their secret chambers, his chief complaint was, that "they set them up *in their hearts*[u]. And has he not told *us*, that "covetousness is idolatry;" and that we may "make a god of our belly?" What then is this but to say, that "the loving and serving the creature more than the Creator," whatever that creature be, is idolatry? We know full well, that gods of wood and of stone were "*vanities*;" but are not pleasure, and riches, and honour, "*vanities*," when put in competition with our God? and does not the inordinate pursuit of them provoke him to jealousy, as much as the bowing down to stocks and stones ever did? And if the rejection of Jesus by the Jews was that crime which filled up the measure of their iniquities, and brought the wrath of God upon them to the uttermost; shall not "the crucifying of the Son of God afresh, and putting him to an open shame," as Christians do by their iniquities, be also considered as provoking the most high God? Let us not think then that the Jews *alone* can provoke God to anger, or that they *alone* can ever be cast off for their wickedness; for he has expressly warned us by his Apostle, that he will cast *us* off, even as he did *them*, if we provoke him to jealousy by placing on the creature the affections that are due to

[s] Acts x. & xi. 1, 18. [t] Eph. iii. 6, 9, 10. [u] Ezek. xiv. 3, 4, 7.

to him. Hear what St. Paul says; "Be not high-minded, but fear: for if God spared not the natural branches, take heed, lest he also spare not thee[x]." My Brethren, you cannot but see how grievously God is dishonoured by the Christian world: truly, "he is provoked by us every day;" and we, no less than the Jews, are "a rebellious and stiff-necked people." Look at all ranks and orders of men amongst us, and see whether there be not a lamentable departure from primitive Christianity? Compare the lives of the generality with the examples of Christ and his Apostles, and see, not merely how short they come of the pattern set before them, (for *that* the best amongst us do,) but how opposite they are in their conduct; insomuch that, if they did not *call themselves* Christians, no one would ever think of calling them so, from their lives. Those who are in earnest about the salvation of their souls, are still "as men wondered at" amongst us; so that instead of pointing at an unhappy few as exceptions to the Christian character, no one can tread in the steps of Christ and his Apostles, without becoming "a sign and a wonder" among his neighbours. This you cannot but know: what then must we expect, but that God will punish *us* precisely has he has done the Jews, and provoke us to jealousy, by others whom we despise? The fact is, that God is already dealing with us in this manner. The rich, the great, the noble are, for the most part, so occupied with "vanities," as to forget the services which they owe to God; and the consequence is, that God overlooks them, and transfers the blessings of his Gospel to the poor. At this day it is true, no less than in the days of the Apostles, that "not many rich, not many mighty, not many noble are called," but "God has chosen the weak, and base, and foolish things of the world; yea, and *things which are not*, to bring to nought *things which are*; that no flesh should glory in his presence:" and this very circumstance does move the rich to anger, precisely as it did in the days of old; "Have any of the Rulers, or of the Pharisees, believed

[x] Rom. xi. 21.

believed on him? As for these poor contemptible people that make such a noise about religion, they are cursed." But I must go further, and say, that God is dealing in this very way even with those who do profess themselves his peculiar people. Who are the happy Christians? Who have the richest enjoyment of the Gospel, or most adorn it in their life and conversation? Are they the richer professors, whose hearts are set on "vanities," or who are labouring night and day to procure them? Are they not rather the poor and the destitute, who, having but little of this world, are more anxious to enjoy their God? We say not indeed that this is universally the case; but it is a general truth: nay more, amongst Indians and Hottentots there is often found a more lively and realizing sense of the Divine presence, than amongst the worldly-minded professors of our own day. I must intreat you therefore, Brethren, to reflect, that if we do not, as a people, turn more heartily unto the Lord, we have reason to fear, lest "the candlestick should be removed from us," and be transferred to a people who shall walk more worthy of it.

Lastly, we should be stirred up by this subject *to concur with God in his gracious intentions towards the Jews.* In the song before us, there are repeated intimations that God will once more restore to his favour his now degenerate and afflicted people. In verse 36, it is said, "The Lord will judge his people, and repent himself for his servants, when he seeth that their power is gone, and that there is none shut up or left." And the song concludes with these remarkable words, "Rejoice, O ye nations! with his people: for he will avenge the blood of his servants, and will render vengeance to his adversaries, and *will be merciful unto his land, and unto his people.*" Here then, you see, that there is mercy in reserve for the Jewish people, and that the Gentiles also shall be partakers of their joy. But in our text there is a hint of a very peculiar nature, namely, not merely that God will vouchsafe mercy to them, *in the*

*the midst of* their present chastisement, but that *he will render those very chastisements subservient to his gracious designs.* He intimates that he is even now provoking them to jealousy, by the mercies he bestows on *us*; that is, that he is even now endeavouring to inflame them with a holy desire to regain his favour. It is precisely in this sense that St. Paul uses the same expression: indeed, St. Paul tells us, that he himself used *the very same means* for *the same end*: "Through the fall of the Jews (says he) is salvation come to the Gentiles, to *provoke them to jealousy*. Now I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I am the Apostle of the Gentiles, I magnify mine office; if by any means I *may provoke to jealousy* (it is the same word as before[y]) them which are my flesh, and might save some of them." This then is the work in which we are to co-operate with God: and, truly, if we were all in earnest about it, we might, with God's help, do great things. They behold us professing ourselves to be the peculiar people of God: and, if they saw so great a difference between themselves and us as they ought to see, truly they would begin to envy us, and to wish to be partakers of our blessings. But, if they see that we are as covetous and worldly-minded, as lewd and sensual, as proud and vindictive, and, in short, as corrupt in all respects as the very heathen, shall we not prove a stumbling-block, rather than an help, to them? And what if, whilst we ought all to be uniting with one heart and one soul in the blessed work of leading them to Christ, they should find amongst us an utter indifference to their salvation? Yea, what if they behold amongst us some (some too of whom we might hope better things) to whom the exertions of their brethren are rather a matter of offence than of joy; some whose endeavour is rather to frustrate than advance our benevolent labours? What if they behold some who, instead of labouring with us to provoke *them* to jealousy, are themselves provoked to an ungodly jealousy against *us*, on account of our

[y] Παραζηλώσω, Rom. xi. 11, 14.

our exertions; and who, like Tobiah and Sanballat of old, "are grieved that we have undertaken to seek the welfare of Israel[a]?" Will not our Jewish brethren take advantage of this? Will they not impute this to our religion? If they see us thus worldly, or thus malignant, will they not judge of our principles by our practice; and, instead of envying us our privileges and attainments, will they not be ready to glory over us, and to thank God they are not Christians? Oh, Brethren! we little think what guilt we contract, while practising such abominations. It is said of many, that they are no person's enemy but their own: but this is not true; they are enemies to all around them, whom they vitiate by their example; they are enemies to the Jews, whom they harden in their infidelity; and they are enemies to the heathen, whom they teach to abhor the Christian name. But let it not be so amongst us; let us remember that to us is committed the blessed task of bringing back to God's fold his wandering, yet beloved, people. Nor let us despair of success; "for, if we were cut out of the olive-tree which is wild by nature, and were graffed contrary to nature into a good olive-tree; how much more shall these, which be the natural branches, be graffed into their own olive-tree? If they abide not in unbelief, they *shall* be graffed in; for, though *we* are unable, *God* is able to graff them in again[a]." But then, how is this to be accomplished? it is to be by our means; ("as for the times and the seasons, we say nothing; God has reserved them in his own power:") God has appointed us to seek the salvation of his people; and has communicated his blessings to us *on purpose that we may be* his depository to keep them, and his channel to convey them, for their benefit. Hear his own words: "As ye in times past have not believed God, yet have now obtained mercy through their unbelief; even so have these also now not believed, that *through your mercy they also may obtain mercy*[b]." Let us then address ourselves to the blessed work that God has assigned us. Let us, as God's

[a] Neh. ii. 10. [a] Rom. xi. 23, 24. [b] ib. 30, 31.

God's chosen instruments, endeavour to interest ourselves with *him* to reinstate them in his favour, and interest ourselves with *them* to return unto him. Let us make a conscience of praying for them in secret; let us devise plans for furthering the communication of divine knowledge amongst them; let us not shrink from labour, or trouble, or expense; let us not be deterred by any difficulties, or discouraged by any disappointments: but let us labour for them, as their forefathers did for us; let us tread in the steps of the holy Apostles, and be ready to sacrifice time, and interest, and liberty, and life itself, in their service; and account the saving of their souls the richest recompence that God himself can give us. And, that we may the more effectually provoke them to jealousy, let us shew them that God has done for us as much as he ever did for the patriarchs of old, giving us as intimate an access to him, as firm a confidence in him, and as assured prospects of an everlasting acceptance with him, as ever Abraham himself enjoyed. They are apt to think that, in exalting Jesus, we dishonour Jehovah: but let us shew them by our lives, that we render to Jehovah all the love, and honour, and service, that were ever rendered to him by his most eminent saints; and that there is no principle whatever so operative and powerful as the love of our adorable Redeemer. Let us shew them, that communion with the Son has the same effect on us, that communion with the Father had on Moses; that it assimilates us unto God, and constrains all who behold us to acknowledge, that we have been with God. Their eyes are now upon us; upon *us* especially, who are endeavouring to convert them to the faith of Christ: let them therefore see in *us* the influence of Christian principles: let them see that, whilst we speak of enjoying peace through the blood of our great sacrifice, and of having the Holy Spirit as our Comforter and Sanctifier, we live as none others can live, exhibiting in our conduct the faith of Abraham, the meekness of Moses, the patience of Job, the piety of David, and

and the fidelity of Daniel: in a word, let them see in us an assemblage of all the brightest virtues of their most renowned progenitors. Oh! would to God that there were in all of us such a heart! Would to God that the Holy Spirit might be poured out upon us for this end, and work in us so effectually, that the very sight of us should be sufficient to carry conviction to their minds; that so our Jewish brethren, beholding "the exceeding grace of God in us," might be constrained to "take hold of our skirt, and say, 'We will go with you, for we perceive that God is with you of a truth[c]."

[c] Zech. viii. 23.

## CLVIII.

### THE EXCELLENCY OF JEHOVAH.

Deut. xxxii. 31. *Their rock is not as our Rock, even our enemies themselves being judges.*

IT is not a little to the honour of those who serve God, that the more fully their principles are investigated, the more just will they appear, and worthy to be adopted by all the world. Those embraced by ungodly men are often such as scarcely to be vindicated by their most partial friends: but those, which the children of God profess, will stand the test of examination from their bitterest enemies. To this effect Moses speaks in the words before us; from which we shall,

I. Point out the superiority of Jehovah above all other objects of confidence—

Neither the idols of heathens, nor any other objects of confidence, can in any point of view be put in competition with Jehovah. Consider

His power—

[There is not any thing which he is not able to effect; "He doeth according to his will in the armies of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth."—But what created Being can claim this Prerogative?—]

His love—

[Incomprehensible are the heights and depths of the Father's

Father's love, discovered in sending his own Son to die for us; nor less the love of Christ in giving himself a sacrifice for our sins.—Is there any other Being that ever has expressed, or ever can, such love as this?—]

His faithfulness—

[God has given to us exceeding great and precious promises, suited to every want we can possibly experience.—And has one jot or tittle of his word ever failed?—But where shall we find a creature that has not, in some respect or other, disappointed the expectations of those who trusted in him?—]

So indisputable is the point before us, that we may even,

II. Appeal to the very enemies of Jehovah in confirmation of our assertions—

We might with propriety appeal to his *friends*, since they, by their knowledge of him, and their experience of the vanity of earthly confidences, are best qualified to judge. But, waving this just advantage, we will appeal,

1. To his enemies of former times—

[In the contest with the worshippers of Baal, this matter was brought to a trial: and what was the result? the very idolaters themselves exclaimed, "The Lord, He is God! The Lord, He is God[a]!"—Nebuchadnezzar was in like manner forced to acknowledge the vanity of the idol he had set up, and to confess that no other god could effect such a deliverance for his votaries, as Jehovah had wrought for the Hebrew youths[b].]

2. To his enemies at this day—

[There are many who are ready to think that too much honour is ascribed to God, when the weakness of all created confidences is exposed. But we will appeal to *their judgment*, whether they do not think that an omniscient, and omnipotent Being, whose providence and grace have been so marvellously displayed, be not more worthy of our trust than an arm of flesh? We appeal also to *their experience*; for though, through their ignorance of Jehovah, they cannot declare what HE is, they do know, and must confess, that the creature, when confided in as a source of true happiness, invariably shews itself to be "vanity and vexation of spirit."]

ADDRESS—

1. Let those who have undervalued our Rock, repent of their folly—

[Not

[a] 1 Kin. xviii. 39. [b] Dan. iii. 29.

[Not idolaters alone, but all, who do not supremely love and adore the Saviour, must be considered as undervaluing this our Rock: and, if they do not repent of their conduct now, they will bewail it ere long with endless and unavailing sorrow. Let them then consider, that, with respect to *temporal* things, there is none other that can deliver them from trouble, or support them under it: and that, with respect to *spiritual* things, there is no wisdom, strength, or righteousness, but in Him alone. Let them consider, that "in him all fulness dwells;" and that, if they trust in him, he will give them all that is needful for body and soul, for time and eternity.—O that they were wise and would turn unto him, and cleave to him with full purpose of heart!]

2. Let those, who trust in Jesus, glory in him as an all-sufficient portion—

[They who build on this Rock need never fear: however high their expectations are raised, they shall never be disappointed of their hope. They may enlarge their desires, even as hell itself that is never satisfied; they may ask all that God himself can bestow; and, provided it be good for them, they shall possess it all: however "wide they open their mouth, God will fill it." In vain shall either men or devils seek to injure them; for "one of them should chase a thousand, and two put ten thousand to flight[c]."—Let them then consider what an almighty Friend they have; and endeavour to "walk worthy of Him who has called them to his kingdom and glory."]

[c] ver. 30.

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## CLIX.

### OUR EXTREMITY IS GOD'S OPPORTUNITY.

Deut. xxxii. 36. *The Lord shall judge his people, and repent himself for his servants, when he seeth that their power is gone, and there is none shut up or left.*

IT is a certain truth that God is immutable in his purposes, whether of judgment or of mercy. In the execution of either there may be long delays: but neither the one nor the other shall fail. The sins of the impenitent "are laid up in store with him, and sealed up among his treasures:" and how secure soever the ungodly may imagine themselves, they shall give up their account to him, "to whom belongeth vengeance and recompence:" yes, they may

may stand fast in their own apprehension; but "their feet shall slide in due time: for the day of their calamity is at hand; and the things that shall come upon them make haste[a];" or, to use the energetic language of St. Peter, "their judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not[b]." In like manner are mercies reserved for his chosen people: and though he may, for wise and gracious purposes, suffer them to be reduced to the greatest extremities, as he did his people in Babylon[bb], yet will he interpose effectually for them in due season, repenting himself for them, when he sees that their power is gone, and that there is none shut up or left."

In confirmation of this truth I propose to shew,

I. To what a state God's people may be reduced—

God's ways and thoughts are far different from ours. We should be ready to suppose that he would preserve his people from any great calamities, and interpose for their deliverance at the very commencement of their trials. But this is not the way in which he proceeds. He permits his people to be severely tried,

1. By temporal afflictions—

[To these is the primary reference in the text[c]——— And the whole of God's dispensations towards his people, in Egypt and the wilderness, evince the truth of it. Nor is it the wicked only whom he permits to be visited with severe afflictions: the righteous in every age have drunk deep of the cup of sorrow which has been put into their hands[d]: God has seen it "needful that they should be in heaviness through manifold temptations[e];" and has taught them to regard their lot, not as a mark of his displeasure, but rather as a token of his love[f].]

2. By spiritual trouble—

[Many, previous to their finding peace with God, are brought into the deepest distress on account of their iniquities, and from an apprehension of God's heavy displeasure[g]——— And many too after that they have obtained mercy, may yet be greatly tried by reason of the hidings of God's face[h], and the delays of

[a] ver. 34, 35. [b] 2 Pet. ii. 3. [bb] See Mic. iv. 10.
[c] Compare Judg. ii. 14, 15, 18. with 2 Kin. xiv. 26.
[d] Heb. xi. 37, 38. Acts viii. 3, 4. [e] 1 Pet. i. 6.
[f] Heb. xii. 6. [g] Ps. vi. 1—7. & xxxviii. 1—8.
[h] Ps. xxii. 1, 2. & xlii. 6, 7.

of his promised blessings[i] — — — Greater distress than this cannot be imagined; yet was it the lot of him who was "the man after God's own heart,"]

But let us contemplate,

II. The seasonable interpositions which they may hope for—

"God will judge his people, and repent himself for his servants," when he sees them reduced to such a state as this.

He has done this in instances without number—

[The whole history of the Bible is replete with instances: yea, on numberless occasions have his interpositions been so signal, that his most inveterate enemies have been constrained to acknowledge his hand, and his most unbelieving people to sing his praise. The Hundred and seventh Psalm is in fact an epitome of God's dealings with his people from the beginning of the world to this present moment — — — And there is not any one amongst ourselves, who, if he have been at all observant of the ways of Providence, must not acknowledge, that he has both seen in others, and experienced in himself, many merciful interpositions in the hour of need.]

He will do it to the end of time—

[The words before us are in the form of a promise: and we may rely upon them as sure and faithful. They shall be fulfilled to us under temporal distresses[k] — — — and under spiritual trouble also will God surely remember them for our good. Where can we find a more disconsolate state than that depicted by the prophet Isaiah? Yet sooner will God work for us the most stupendous miracles than leave us destitute of the desired aid[l] — — —]

The frequency of such interpositions leads me to point out,

III. The reason why God permits such crises previous to the bestowment of his promised blessings—

Amongst many other reasons, he does it,

1. For the making of us more sensible of our dependence upon him—

[Whilst, in theory, we acknowledge God as "the Author and Giver of all good," there is no sentiment farther from our minds

[i] Ps. lxxvii. 1—9. & lxxxviii. 14—16. & cii. 1—11.
[k] Ps. xxxiii. 18, 19. [l] Isai. xli. 17, 18.

minds than this in practice. It is only in straits and difficulties that we think of looking unto God. But such atheism is most displeasing to the Governor of the universe: and on this account he suffers us to fall into divers temptations, that we may know from whence all our blessings have flowed, and on whose providence we depend. St. Paul assigns this as one very important reason why God permitted such trials to come upon him in Asia, that he was driven to utter despair: "We were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life: but we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God who raiseth the dead; who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver; in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us[m]." And every affliction that brings us to a more simple life of faith on God, we may justly welcome as a blessing in disguise.]

2. For the magnifying the more his own glorious perfections—

[We scarcely notice God at all in his common mercies: it is only when we are delivered by some signal interposition of his providence or grace, that we become sensible of our obligations to him. Then we say, The Lord hath done this: and we feel disposed, for a time at least, to give him the glory due unto his name. It was for this reason that Jesus came not to restore Lazarus, till he had been dead four days[n]. Under such circumstances we admire his goodness, and adore his love; and confess him to be a faithful God, who has never failed in the execution of any promise to his believing people. The Song of Moses is sung by us again: "Who is like unto thee, O Lord, amongst the gods? Who is like thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders[o]?" Conviction flashes on our minds with tenfold energy; and we exclaim with the convinced worshippers of Baal, "The Lord, he is the God! the Lord, he is the God!"]

3. For the rendering of his mercies more influential on our minds—

[When God's mercies have been heaped upon us in an unusual degree, then we feel disposed to ask, "What shall I render to the Lord for all the benefits that he hath done unto me?" Behold David after some great deliverance, whereby "his soul was brought out of a horrible pit, and set, as it were, upon a rock;" "what songs were put into his mouth;" and with what ardour does he exclaim, "Blessed is the man that maketh the Lord his trust[p]!" St. Paul had been brought to similar distress by reason of the thorn in his flesh: yet, when once assured that "the grace of Christ should be sufficient for him," how does he immediately

[m] 2 Cor. i. 8—10. [n] John xi. 4, 6, 15, 40.
[o] Exod. xv. 11. [p] Ps. xl. 1—4.

immediately take pleasure and glory in all that he either did or could endure[q]! And thus will it be with all, in proportion as they are sensible of the mercies conferred upon them: they will present their whole selves a living sacrifice unto their God as a reasonable and delightful service[r].]

ADDRESS—

1. To those who are under any temporal affliction—

[Say not, that "the Lord has forsaken and forgotten you[s]:" but wait his leisure, and assure yourselves that "all is working for your good." It was by a circuitous path that he led Israel to the promised land: but "he led them by the right way:" and you also shall see, in due season, that though "clouds and darkness have been round about him, righteousness and judgment have been the basis of his throne."]

2. To those whose trials are of a spiritual nature—

[These are the heavier of the two: for "a wounded spirit who can bear?" But "light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart." Only wait the appointed time, and "the vision shall come, and not tarry[t]." "In the evening time it shall be light[u]." In the mean while follow the direction which the Lord himself gives you; and, whilst "walking in darkness and without light, trust in the Lord, and stay yourselves upon your God[x]."]

[q] 2 Cor. xii. 7—10. [r] Rom. xii. 1. [s] Isai. xlix. 14.
[t] Hab. iii. 2. [u] Zech. xiv. 7. [x] Isai. l. 10.

## CLX.

### THE BLESSING BESTOWED ON THE TRIBE OF LEVI.

Deut. xxxiii. 8, 9. *And of Levi he said, Let thy Thummim and thy Urim be with thy holy one, whom thou didst prove at Massah, and with whom thou didst strive at the waters of Meribah; who said unto his father and to his mother, I have not seen him; neither did he acknowledge his brethren, nor knew his own children: for they have observed thy word, and kept thy covenant.*

AS the father of his people, Moses desired to bless them before his death; and the pronouncing of this blessing, in which he was endued with a spirit of prophecy, was the last act of his life. The grounds on which the blessing was bestowed on the tribe of Levi, are so peculiar, that they deserve a distinct consideration. There is manifestly a testimony given them

them of decided approbation: and from this circumstance commentators have been led to regard the whole of what is spoken in the text as of the same import; and to supply from conjecture what is no where noticed in the Mosaic history, or rather to contradict altogether what is plainly noticed. The conduct of Levi both at *Massah* (which was also called Meribah), and, above thirty-eight years afterwards, at another place called *Meribah*, was exceeding sinful[a]. At the latter place in particular, both Moses and Aaron, as well as the people, offended God; and were for that offence doomed to die in the wilderness, and never to enter into the promised land. Hence it might have been supposed that God would punish the tribe of Levi and the house of Aaron by withdrawing from them the peculiar honours he had conferred upon them; but as on one occasion they had signalized themselves by a very exalted act of obedience, he was pleased to record what they had done, and to make it an occasion of continuing in their line the most distinguished testimonies of his regard. This sense accords with the history; to the very terms of which the text seems specifically to refer[b].

In the words before us there are two things particularly to be noticed;

I. The commendation of Levi—

The act for which they were commended was truly laudable—

[When the people throughout the camp of Israel were worshipping the golden calf, Moses, filled with indignation, called the Levites to him, and bid them gird on swords and slay the ringleaders in idolatry throughout the whole camp: and this order they executed immediately, without any respect of persons whatever: they spared not either their nearest relatives or their dearest friends; but slew of the people 3000 men[c].

This would be thought by many to be a savage act, and to deserve censure rather than praise: but it must be remembered, that God was, if I may so speak, their earthly Governor, (they lived under a Theocracy;) and, that they acted in obedience to their supreme Magistrate: nor could cruelty be imputed

[a] Compare Exod. xvii. 7. with Numb. xx. 10—13.
[b] Compare the language in Numb. xx. 13. with the text.
[c] Exod. xxxii. 25—29.

imputed to them any more than to any person who executes the laws amongst ourselves. They were justified in what they did, precisely as Phinehas was justified in destroying Zimri and Cozbi. The law itself required, that, if their nearest relative only enticed them to idolatry, even where there was no overt act committed, they should instantly give information against him, and with their own hands put him to death[d]. But here was the overt act visible to all; and the Civil Magistrate was present to sanction their conduct: and therefore they were bound to obey the order given them, and to execute the laws with impartial severity. Hence their conduct is marked in our text as an act of obedience to God, and a "vindication of the quarrel of his covenant[e]."]

Nor is it by any means unconnected with *our* duty as Christians—

[Certainly *we* have nothing to do with the judgment of zeal, nor any right to take the execution of the laws into our own hands. But we should be zealous for the honour of God; and we ought, in subserviency to the laws, to exert ourselves for the suppression of open impiety and profaneness. More particularly are we bound to serve God ourselves, and to account all personal sacrifices as unworthy of a thought in comparison of our duty to him. Our Lord tells us, not only that "if we love father or mother more than him, we are not worthy of him;" but that we must "*hate* father and mother, yea, and our own lives also, if we would be his disciples[f]." Of course this must not be understood *positively*; (for the Gospel inspires nothing but *love*, and *that* even to our bitterest enemies:) but it must be taken *comparatively*; and be explained as intimating, that we should be so firm and decided in our obedience to him as to be altogether unmoved by the affection or menaces of our dearest friends, or even by the apprehensions of the most cruel death. Our Lord himself has set us an example in this respect: for, when some persons told him that his "mother and his brethren were standing without, and desirous to speak with him, he replied, Who is my mother? and who are my brethren? Whosoever shall do the will of my Father, the same is my brother and sister and mother[g]." Thus must love to the Creator be the predominant affection in *our* hearts; and all inferior considerations must be subordinated to his glory.]

From the commendation given them we proceed to notice,

II. Their reward—

This may be considered as of two kinds;

1. Official

[d] Deut. xiii. 6—10.
[e] Lev. xxvi. 25. with the text.
[f] Matt. x. 37. & Luke xiv. 26.
[g] Matt. xii. 47—50.

1. Official honour—

[The Urim and Thummim were in some way united to the breast plate of the high priest; and by means of them he was enabled to discover the mind and will of God when he went in before the Lord to consult him on any particular occasion. What they were, and how they answered the purpose for which they were made, we are not informed: and therefore it is in vain to waste time in conjectures. Suffice it to say, that the high priest who wore them was authorized to consult God in all public matters, and enabled to discover his mind and will[h]. Now Moses prays, and indeed prophetically declares, that this high honour should descend to the posterity of Aaron; and that the service of the tabernacle should continue to be administered by the tribe of Levi[i]. This was a most exalted privilege; and, above a thousand years afterwards, it was expressly declared to have been given as a reward of the obedience before referred to[k]. What a glorious testimony was this, that God will suffer nothing that we do for him to pass unnoticed even here: much less shall it go unrewarded in a future world. Truly "them that honour God, God will honour;" and every one that will serve him shall receive an abundant "recompence of reward"———]

2. Personal benefit—

[The official honour was conferred on the posterity of those whose conduct was approved. But do we suppose that the immediate agents were overlooked, and that no blessing was bestowed on them? We can have no doubt but that they also had a recompence in their own bosoms. The import of the words *Urim* and *Thummim* is, *Illuminations* and *Perfections:* and these are the special benefits which God will confer on all his faithful servants. There is indeed a manifest connexion between the work and the reward. The work in this present instance was a vigorous maintenance of God's honour, with an utter disregard of every consideration in comparison of it: and where that is, there will be a clear insight into the Divine will, and a growing conformity to the Divine image. Where internal rectitude is wanting, the mind will be obscured, and the feet will stumble: but "where the single eye is, there will the whole body be full of light," and the conversation be regulated agreeably to the commands of God. Light in the mind, and holiness in the life, are mutually influential on each other: each will languish or be advanced, according as the other flourishes or decays: illumination and perfection will be the portion of the decided Christian; but darkness and inconsistency will be the fruit of a temporizing and timid conduct.]

To

[h] Exod. xxviii. 29, 30. [i] Deut. xxxiii. 11, 12. [k] Mal. ii. 5.

To prevent misapprehension or misconduct, we shall SUBJOIN a word,

1. Of caution—

[Let not any one imagine that religion countenances a fiery zeal on any occasion whatever. The conduct of the Levites has not been proposed for imitation under the Gospel dispensation, any further than is necessary for the maintaining of stedfastness in our allegiance to God. We are not to wage war, except against our spiritual enemies: and even then the weapons of our warfare must not be carnal, but spiritual. In all the opposition which it may be necessary to make to our earthly friends or relatives, we must maintain a holy meekness and patience, not attempting to oppose evil by evil, but to "overcome evil with good." The Civil Magistrate indeed may use the sword, and ought to be "a terror to evil-doers;" and all Christians should be ready to aid him in the suppression of iniquity: but in all private and personal concerns our only armour must be that which God himself has provided for us[l], and we must "overcome our enemies by the blood of the Lamb[m]."]

2. Of direction—

[Let a concern for God's honour and your own spiritual advancement be paramount to all other considerations whatever. You must "not account even life itself dear to you, so that you may but finish your course with joy." It must never be a question with you, whether you will perform any particular duty, however difficult it may be, or whatever self-denial it may require: your mind must be made up to "follow the Lord fully," and to observe the commandments of God "without preferring one before another, and doing nothing by partiality." This is the way to entail the blessing of God upon your souls, and to "grow both in knowledge and in grace." But you must not attempt these things in your own strength: in order that you may be enabled to act thus, you must pray to "the God of peace to sanctify you wholly," and to "make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well-pleasing in his sight through Jesus Christ: to whom be glory for ever and ever: Amen[n]."]

[l] Eph. vi. 11—17. [m] Rev. xii. 11.
[n] 1 Thess. v. 23. Heb. xiii. 20, 21.

## CLXI.

### THE HAPPINESS OF GOD'S PEOPLE.

Deut. xxxiii. 29. *Happy art thou, O Israel: who is like unto thee, O people saved by the Lord, the shield of thy help, and who is the sword of thy excellency!*

THE God of Israel is infinitely exalted above all the gods of the heathen: and though there cannot be any such disparity between one creature and another, as between the Creator and the creature, yet is there a wonderful difference between the people of God and all other people upon the face of the whole earth. This indeed is a necessary consequence of the former: for, if there be no god like the God of Israel, there can be no people like the Israel of God, since they, and they only, have Jehovah for their God. These truths are united in the passage before us: the former had been mentioned in a preceding verse[a]; and, in the text, the latter is declared, together with its dependence on the former.

From these words we shall consider,

I. The happiness of God's people—

The manner in which Moses speaks on this subject is worthy of notice: we may observe in his address to Israel a strong persuasion of the truth he was uttering, an unfeigned delight in declaring it, and an affectionate solicitude, that they might both be persuaded of it themselves, and live in the comfortable enjoyment of it. He affirms that they were,

1. Truly happy—

[It is God's own declaration, "Happy art thou, O Israel!" and, if appearances were ever so unfavourable, we might be sure that his judgment was according to truth. But this testimony agrees with the experience of God's people in every age. They are represented as possessing a "peace that passeth understanding," and a "joy that is unspeakable and glorified." Is it objected that they are also represented as mourning[b], as tempted[c], as persecuted[d]? True; yet none of these things interfere with their real happiness; yea, instead of destroying, they advance it[e]. If then they can be happy in such situations as these[f], and even

[a] ver. 26. [b] Matt. v. 3, 4. [c] Jam. i. 2, 12.
[d] Luke vi. 22, 23. 1 Pet. iv. 14. [e] See Notes [b] [c] [d].
[f] Act xvi. 23—25.

even derive happiness from these situations[g], they must be truly happy.]

2. Incomparably happy—

[It is God himself who challenges all mankind to vie with his people; and this too, not in respect of privileges merely, or of prospects, but in respect of present enjoyments. Who are they that will presume to rival the Lord's people? Ye great, ye rich, ye gay, what is your happiness, when compared with that which God's Israel possess? Is not all your happiness *mixed* with gall? Is it not altogether *dependent* on the creature? Is it not *cloying*, even in the very possession? Do you not find it *transient*, and, on the whole, *delusive*, promising far more in the anticipation than it ever affords in the enjoyment? In all these things it is the very reverse of the Christian's happiness. His, as far as it is derived from spiritual things, is unmixed: none can rob him of it, because none can intercept the visits of his God: no man was ever surfeited with spiritual delights: if we lived to the age of Methuselah, we might, by a retrospect, revive a sense of them in our souls: and, if our expectations be raised to ever so high a pitch, the reality will far exceed them. We will therefore confidently repeat the challenge, and say, as in the text, "Who is like unto thee, O people, saved by the Lord?"]

To shew that this is no enthusiastic conceit, we proceed to notice,

II. The grounds of their happiness—

It will soon appear that their blessedness is not a baseless fabric, if we consider,

1. What God has done for them—

[They are "a people saved by the Lord." Salvation is not a blessing which they merely hope for, but which they already possess. They are saved *from the guilt and punishment of sin:* all "their iniquities are blotted out;" and there remains "no condemnation to them:" they are "complete in Christ;" they stand "before God without spot or blemish." But great as this mercy is, they would not be truly happy, if they were not also saved *from the power and dominion of sin.* It is true, they yet carry about with them a "body of sin and death;" but they never commit iniquity as they were wont to do in their unregenerate state: they "cannot sin *thus*, because they are born of God, and his seed remaineth in them." God has promised that "sin shall not have dominion over them;" and they experience the accomplishment of this promise to their souls, being "redeemed from all iniquity, and purified unto God a peculiar people zealous of good works[h]."

And

[g] Acts v. 41. 2 Cor. xii. 10. [h] Tit. ii. 14.

And is not this salvation a ground of happiness, more especially if we consider by whom it was procured, and by whom conferred? It was "the Lord," even Jesus, who purchased our freedom from guilt; and it is "the Lord," even the Holy Ghost, who vouchsafes us a deliverance from sin. Surely such a salvation, bought at such a price, and imparted by such an agent, cannot but be a source of unspeakable felicity to the soul.]

2. What God will be unto them—

[In vain would all past mercies be, if they were not secured to them by the continued agency of Jehovah. A vessel fitted out and freighted, would not more certainly be overwhelmed by storms, if destitute of a pilot, than man, however gifted, would become a prey to Satan, if he were not constantly aided and protected by his God. But Israel is happy in this respect also, since, notwithstanding he is yet upon the field of battle, he is placed, if we may so speak, beyond the reach of harm. He is not only furnished with defensive and offensive armour, but has God himself for his "shield," and God himself for his "sword;" so that his enemies must elude omniscience, before they can destroy him; and must withstand omnipotence, if they do not fall before him. Hence it is that he attains such "excellency," and proves victorious in all his conflicts.

View the Believer thus environed, and thus armed, and you may well say to him, "Happy art thou, O Israel! who is like unto thee?" for the salvation he already possesses, is a pledge and earnest of his everlasting triumphs.]

APPLICATION—

[To whom, besides the true Israel, can we venture to say, "Happy art thou"? Art thou happy, who, instead of having experienced salvation, art yet under the guilt and power of all thy sins; and, instead of having Jehovah for thy shield and thy sword, hast the almighty God for thine enemy? Deceive not thyself: thou mayest dream of happiness; but thou art in a pitiable condition. So far art thou from rivalling the happiness of Israel, thou art even inferior to the beasts that perish; and, if thou wert sensible of thy state, thou wouldst envy them their prospect of annihilation. Oh, if ever thou wouldest be happy, seek to be "saved by the Lord," even by the blood and righteousness of the Lord Jesus, and by the sanctifying influences of his Spirit. What Moses said to his father-in-law, that would God's people say to thee, "Come thou with us, and we will do thee good; for God has spoken good concerning Israel[i]."

As for you who are of the true Israel, seek to be as distinguished for your holiness, as you are for your happiness. When we speak of your felicity, the world cannot understand us, because they

[i] Numb. x. 29.

they are strangers to your feelings. But they can judge of holiness with some considerable degree of accuracy; and your superiority in this respect will be more effectual for their conviction, than all that can be said respecting the happiness of your state. Endeavour then so to live, that we may challenge the world to produce any persons comparable to you in holiness. Enable us to say with confidence, Who is like unto thee, O Israel? Who is dead to the world, as thou art? Who abounds in all holy duties, in all devout affections, in all amiable dispositions, like thee? This will silence those who call your happiness enthusiasm, and will convince them, that you are superior to others, "not in word and in tongue, but in deed and in truth."]

## CLXII.

### RAHAB PROTECTS THE SPIES.

Josh. ii. 8—14. *And before they were laid down, she came up unto them upon the roof: and she said unto the men, I know that the Lord hath given you the land, and that your terror is fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land faint because of you. For we have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea for you, when ye came out of Egypt; and what ye did unto the two kings of the Amorites that were on the other side Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom ye utterly destroyed. And as soon as we had heard these things, our hearts did melt, neither did there remain any more courage in any man, because of you: for the Lord your God, he is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath. Now therefore, I pray you, swear unto me by the Lord, since I have shewed you kindness, that ye will also shew kindness unto my father's house, and give me a true token: and that ye will save alive my father, and my mother, and my brethren, and my sisters, and all that they have, and deliver our lives from death. And the men answered her, Our life for yours, if ye utter not this our business: and it shall be, when the Lord hath given us the land, that we will deal kindly and truly with thee.*

GOD is pleased to accomplish his promises by the use of means: to neglect the means therefore is to tempt him, rather than to trust in him; and to expect the end without using the means is not faith, but presumption. Hence the strongest Believers have always accounted it their duty to exert themselves as much as if success depended solely on their exertions;

exertions; whilst, on the other hand, they placed their hopes in God, as much as if no effort whatever were used by themselves. Joshua had no doubt respecting his ultimate success in conquering and possessing the land of Canaan: yet, as every prudent General endeavours to obtain information respecting the state of any fortified city which he is about to besiege, before he proceeds actually to invest it, so Joshua felt it his duty to send spies to ascertain the state of Jericho, before he passed over Jordan to attack it. To the spies themselves the undertaking was perilous in the extreme: yet they went forth in humble reliance on their God, and were almost miraculously preserved from falling into the hands of their enemies. The manner of their preservation is here circumstantially related: it was effected solely by the good offices of a woman who lived in the city, and to whom they were providentially directed. Her name was Rahab; and she is constantly in the Scriptures called an harlot; but whether she was at that time an harlot, or was a reformed character, we know not: but this is plain, that her mind was wonderfully overruled by God to screen and protect them. The interposition of God in this matter seems to have been not unlike to that which 1500 years afterwards led to the conversion of Cornelius. Cornelius was instructed in a vision to send for Peter, and was directed where to find him: and at the same time Peter was instructed in a vision to go to him, notwithstanding he was a Gentile. Thus the minds of the spies were directed to the only person in the city that would have afforded them an asylum; and her mind was directed to prefer their safety before every other consideration whatever. The conduct of Rahab on this occasion is repeatedly mentioned in the New Testament, and *that* too in terms peculiarly honourable to her. We shall find it therefore not unprofitable to consider,

I. The service she rendered—

In speaking upon this part of our subject, we shall notice separately,

1. What

1. What she did—

[From the first interview which she had with the spies, she knew the true object of their mission; and determined to advance it to the utmost of her power. Her first object therefore was to prevent any discovery: and for this purpose she conducted them to the roof of her house, and there covered them with stalks of flax. As she had foreseen, they were traced to her house, and messengers from the king were sent to apprehend them. She acknowledged that they had been there, but said that they were gone away but a little before, and, if pursued immediately, would certainly be taken. Thus she avoided all suspicion of favouring them, and prevented all further inquiries about them at her house. Having succeeded thus far, she went up to them, and asked of them an assurance, that they, in return for this kindness, would spare her and all her family, when they should take the city. To this they bound themselves and all Israel by a solemn oath; stipulating, however, that the matter should be kept a profound secret; that her family should all be collected under her roof; and that a scarlet line, by which she let them down from her window, should be bound in the window, to prevent any mistake. The instructions which she gave them for the avoiding of their pursuers, were such as prudence directed: these they followed implicitly; and after hiding themselves three days in a neighbouring mountain, they returned across the fords to their own camp in safety. Thus did she effectually preserve the spies that Joshua had sent.]

2. From what principle she acted—

[It certainly appears strange, that she should so betray her king and country; and stranger still, that she should be commended by God himself for this conduct; more especially when we find, that she uttered various falsehoods for the attainment of her end. Let us then investigate this point.

The principle from which she acted, was faith. Of this we are assured on the authority of an inspired Apostle; "By faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not, when she had received the spies with peace[a]." The same is manifest in the account before us. She believed that the God of Israel was the only true God. She believed that God was the great disposer of all events: that he had given the land of Canaan to his people Israel: that he had miraculously opened a way for them through the Red Sea, at their first coming out of Egypt: that he had enabled them to destroy Sihon and Og, the two kings of the Amorites, and to take possession of their land: and that he would infallibly accomplish his promises to them, in the total subjugation of the Canaanites. All this is evident from the very words of our text. Now, if we consider how contracted were the views even of the pious Israelites at that time,

[a] Heb. xi. 31.

time, this faith, strong and assured as it was, was truly wonderful: it might justly be said of her, as of another Canaanitish woman, "O woman, great is thy faith! I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel."

But here arises a question of considerable difficulty: How can we reconcile the falsehoods which she uttered with the professions which she made, and with the commendations given her in the Scriptures? To solve this difficulty, Commentators have had recourse to various expedients; some extenuating, some justifying, and some altogether condemning their conduct. But we apprehend that the true solution must be found in the strength and assurance of her faith: she herself said, not, "*I fear*," or, "*I believe*," but, "*I know* that the Lord hath given you the land." She was fully assured that it was in vain to fight against God: that, if these two spies were put to death, it would make no difference whatever as to the issue of the contest: that the whole city and all its inhabitants would infallibly be destroyed: and that the only possible way of securing herself and family would be to submit to the God of Israel, and to unite themselves to his people. To what purpose then would it be to deliver up the spies? it would not save one single life: it would only be to continue fighting against God, and to bring on herself and all her family that destruction which it was now in her power to avert. By concealing the spies she, in fact, could injure nobody; but by giving them up, she would sacrifice, both for herself and family, all hopes of life either in this world or the world to come. At the same time that this view of the matter gives the easiest solution to the difficulty, it serves to explain the commendation given to her by the apostle James: "Was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way[b]?" Yes; she did by this act evince the reality and strength of her faith, and prove, that she had determined to cast herself entirely, both for time and for eternity, upon the mercy of the God of Israel.

If it is asked, whether faith in God will produce, or even countenance, falsehood; we answer, No: but that question does not fairly belong to the subject: let it be asked, whether Elisha was justified in deceiving the Syrian army, and leading them from Dothan, whither they had come to destroy him, to Samaria, where they were brought into the power of the king of Israel[c]? Or, if the cases be thought not sufficiently parallel, let any one ask, whether, if a maniac were coming to destroy his whole family, he should not think himself justified in denying them to him, when no evil could accrue to the maniac himself by means of it, and the preservation of so many lives depended on it? Yet even this case, strong as it would be, would fall very far short of Rahab's, whose eternal, no less than temporal, interests depended on her

[b] Jam. ii. 25. [c] 2 Kin. vi. 13—19.

her forwarding the purposes of Heaven. But, whether we justify or condemn her conduct, it can afford no precedent to us: for, before we can plead her example in justification of treachery or falsehood, we must be circumstanced like her, which it is nearly impossible we should ever be.]

Such was the service which she rendered to the Lord. Let us now consider,

II. The reward she obtained—

This was greater far than ever she herself could have conceived—

1. She and all her family were preserved—

[In a few days, Joshua and all his army appeared before the city; and, by God's special interposition, took it. The sign before agreed upon had been attended to by Rahab, and the two very persons with whom the agreement had been made were sent to secure the execution of it. They went to the house, brought out Rahab and all her family, and placed them in safety near the camp of Israel: then the order was given to burn the whole city, and to destroy every one of its inhabitants without exception. The fulfilment of the covenant which the spies had entered into is particularly noticed at the taking of Jericho; and Rahab herself long continued in Israel a monument of the mercy of God and of the fidelity of his people[d].

This alone was an exceeding great reward: to be so distinguished *herself;* and, after all the distress which her former wickedness had occasioned to her family, to be made an instrument of saving all *their* lives, surely this was an inestimable benefit, and assimilated her to the angels which rescued Lot and his family from the flames of Sodom.]

2. She is enrolled amongst the number of God's most eminent Saints—

[We have already had occasion to refer to the testimony of two Apostles in her behalf. The very scope of one was to illustrate the transcendent excellence of faith, and of the other to shew its operative and transforming power: by both of them is she united with the patriarch Abraham himself: and by one she is said to be justified by this work of hers, as Abraham was justified by offering up his son Isaac on the altar. The boon she desired was, temporal life; and behold, here was given to her spiritual and eternal life. How loudly did this proclaim to Israel the determination of God to incorporate with them in due time the Gentile world! And how strongly does it declare to us, that "where sin has abounded, grace shall much more abound!" Methinks, as Paul says of himself, that "for this cause he obtained

[d] Josh. vi. 22—25.

obtained mercy, that in him the chief of sinners God might shew forth all long-suffering for a pattern to them that shall hereafter believe on him to life everlasting," so we may say of this woman. O that all the harlots in the world could hear of the mercy shewed to this notorious prostitute! Despised as they are and abandoned by their fellow-creatures, O that they knew what compassion for them exists in the bosom of their God! They usually persist in their wickedness, through an utter despair of obtaining the mercy and grace which they stand in need of: but here they might see, that the vilest of sinners may become the most eminent of saints. Our Lord indeed tells us, that publicans and harlots are often more willing to seek for mercy than proud self-complacent moralists[e]: O that the instance before us might lead many to repentance, and that, like another of whom we read, "having had much forgiven, they may love much!"]

3. She was made an ancestor of the Messiah himself—

[Mysterious truth! A Gentile, belonging to an accursed nation, and to a place peculiarly obnoxious to the wrath of God; and she too, an harlot of peculiar notoriety; to be chosen of God, not only to become an eminent saint, but an instrument of continuing the line of his elect, and ultimately of bringing into the world his only-begotten Son[f]! What shall we say to this? The truth of it cannot be doubted; for she is expressly mentioned in the genealogy of Christ[g]. How infinitely did *this* honour surpass all that she could ever have imagined! What a reward was here for protecting the spies! But verily we never can entertain too exalted thoughts of God's love and mercy: the riches of his grace are altogether unsearchable, and the extent of his love, incomprehensible.

This however we may learn from it, that God will abundantly recompense whatever we do for him — — — "Even a cup of cold water given for his sake, shall in no wise lose its reward." Let us then enlarge our expectations from him, and open our mouths wide, that he may fill them. Let us not be afraid to incur risks for him; but let us serve him at all events, accounting nothing of any value in comparison of his favour, nothing desirable but an inheritance with his people — — —]

*** The brief practical hints contained under these three subdivisions, might be omitted, and added separately as three inferences from the subject. Thus—INFER, 1. There is no person so vile, but he may

[e] Matt. xxi. 31. [f] Matt. i. 5.

[g] If *Salmon*, who married her, was, as is by no means improbable, one of the two spies, what beautiful considerations would arise out of that circumstance! But, where there is so much known, it is not desirable, unnecessarily, to introduce conjecture.

may become an eminent saint—2. Faith, if true, will uniformly produce good works—3. Whatever we do for God shall most assuredly be richly rewarded. This plan would contract the second head; but it would admit of these important thoughts being more expanded and enforced.

## CLXIII.

### THE PASSAGE OF JORDAN COMMEMORATED.

Josh. iv. 20—24. *Those twelve stones, which they took out of Jordan, did Joshua pitch in Gilgal. And he spake unto the children of Israel, saying, When your children shall ask their fathers in time to come, saying, What mean these stones? then ye shall let your children know, saying, Israel came over this Jordan on dry land: for the Lord your God dried up the waters of Jordan from before you, until ye were passed over, as the Lord God did to the Red Sea, which he dried up from before us, until we were gone over: that all the people of the earth might know the hand of the Lord, that it is mighty; that ye might fear the Lord your God for ever.*

TO remember God's mercies to us, and to transmit the remembrance of them to future generations, is a solemn duty imposed upon us, especially where the mercies are of such a nature as to involve the welfare of our posterity as well as our own[a]. On different occasions God appointed memorials for that express purpose; and ordered, that the children in all succeeding generations should make inquiries respecting them, and receive an answer from one duly qualified to give the desired instruction. This was the case with respect to the passover, which was instituted in order to perpetuate the remembrance of the deliverance of Israel from the sword of the destroying angel, when all the firstborn of Egypt were slain[b]. The passage of the Israelites through Jordan was also to be borne in everlasting remembrance. For this end twelve stones were erected in Gilgal; and an order was given, that when children, even to the remotest ages, should inquire what event these stones referred to, they

[a] Ps. lxxviii. 4—8.

[b] Exod. xii. 24—27. So the unleavened bread, xiii. 7, 8.

they should be informed of all the circumstances which took place when their forefathers first entered into the promised land. We propose to notice two things;

I. The mercy commemorated—

[Here we shall content ourselves with briefly relating the circumstances which preceded and accompanied the passage of the Israelites over the river Jordan. That they are deserving of our attention is evident from the injunction given by the prophet many hundred years afterwards; "O my people, remember now what Balak king of Moab consulted, and what Balaam son of Beor answered him *from Shittim unto Gilgal*, that ye may know the righteousness of the Lord." *Shittim* was the place from whence they last proceeded (perhaps about seven miles) to the banks of Jordan[c]. There all the people were ordered to sanctify themselves, in order that on the morrow they might be in a fit state to behold the wonders which the Lord was about to do for them[d].

The time being arrived, the ark, which was wont to be carried in the midst of them, was borne before them, and they were to follow it at a respectful distance (about three quarters of a mile), that they might all be able to behold it, and that they might see, that, instead of their protecting it, they owed all their protection to it. And the respectful distance which they were to keep, gives us a most important hint in reference to the mode in which we should on all occasions follow divine Providence: precipitancy must be avoided, as well as delay.

As soon as the priests who carried the ark touched the brim of the waters with their feet, (for at that season, the snows of Lebanon having begun to melt, the river, as was usual, had overflowed its banks,) the waters were arrested in their course, and formed a wall on their right hand; whilst those which had passed them ran down towards the Dead Sea, and left the channel dry for the space of several miles[e]. The priests then proceeded with the ark into the midst of the channel, and abode there whilst the whole nation of Israel, with their cattle and baggage, passed over: nor did they leave their position, till they were expressly ordered to do so by God himself: and then, as soon as ever their feet touched the opposite bank, the waters resumed their course, and flowed in their accustomed channel. What a proof was here, that the passage was opened not by any natural means, but by the immediate agency of God himself! The

[c] Josh. iii. 1.

[d] Josh. iii. 5. A similar order was issued previous to the giving of the law, Exod. xix. 10, 11, 13, 14.

[e] From Adam to the part opposite Jericho was eighteen or twenty miles, Josh. iii. 16.

The people "hasted over," for, where so much was to be done in one day, there was no time to be lost; but we do not apprehend that their haste proceeded from any unbelieving fear of the impending flood; it rather indicated a fearless confidence in the divine protection, and an assurance that the enemies whom they were invading should not be permitted to prevail against them.]

Such was the mercy vouchsafed unto them. Let us now proceed more particularly to notice,

II. The means used to perpetuate the remembrance of it—

For this end two monuments were erected; one, of twelve stones, in Jordan, on the very spot where the priests who bore the ark had stood, which was probably visible at low water; and the other in *Gilgal*, where they immediately afterwards encamped.

In our text two reasons are assigned for the erection of them; they were to serve, both to Israel and to the world at large,

1. As evidences of God's power—

[What could not God effect, who by a simple act of volition wrought such a miracle as this? The miracle could not be denied, because the stones which commemorated it were taken out of the midst of the river by persons selected for the purpose out of all the tribes. Who then, we may ask,

*Who can ever oppose him with success?*

It should seem that the Canaanites, if they had acted according to the rules of war, should have opposed the Israelites in their passage: but the destruction of Pharaoh at the Red Sea had spread such a panic through the land, that they did not dare to avail themselves of any supposed advantage, lest they should perish after his example. The event indeed shews how vain any attempt on their part would have been. And does not this convince us, that, when the measure of any person's iniquities is full, he shall in no wise escape the vengeance of his God? Whatever obstacles may appear to lie in the way, and whatever barrier an ungodly world may have, or think they have, for their defence, God will surely make a way to his indignation: opposing myriads shall be only as the stubble before the consuming fire: "though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not be unpunished." Let any one, dreaming of security, go and behold the stones in Gilgal: let him ask of Jordan, "What ailed thee, O thou sea, that thou fleddest? and thou Jordan, that thou wast driven back?" and then let him add with the Psalmist, "Tremble, thou

thou earth, at the presence of the Lord, at the presence of the God of Jacob[f]." We may further ask,

*Who can ever fail, that trusteth in him?*

There might have been some hope of crossing the ford, as the spies had done, if the river had not overflowed its banks: but now it seemed to present an insurmountable obstacle to their passage, especially considering that their cattle and baggage were to be taken over with them. But this generation were not like those who had perished in the wilderness; they had learned to confide in God: and God interposed for them in a way which they do not appear to have at all expected. It had been promised indeed that they should pass over Jordan, and that no opposition should be made to them in their passage; for that their enemies, "through fear and dread, should be still as a stone" till all the people should have completely passed[g]: but they do not seem to have had any precise idea of the way in which the promises should be accomplished: nor, on the other hand, do they appear to have entertained any doubts but that they should be brought over in safety. Their confidence was well rewarded; and the very impediments which obstructed their progress served only to display and magnify the power of God.

Thus, whatever difficulties his people may have to surmount, they may at all times adopt the triumphant language of the Prophet, "Who art thou, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain:" and they may assuredly expect, that "He who has laid the foundation, will finish it, and will bring forth the top-stone with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace, unto it[h]!" But these monuments were intended also]

2. As memorials of his love—

[The conduct of Israel in the wilderness abundantly shewed, that God had "never set his love upon them for their righteousness," but solely from his own free and sovereign grace. When therefore they looked upon these stones, they could not but see how greatly he was to be loved, and honoured, and feared, and served, for all the mercy, the undeserved mercy, which he had shewn unto them. They would be ever ready to exclaim, "Who is like unto thee, O God, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?"

In like manner *we* may see in these stones how effectually God will interpose in *our* behalf, if only we fear and honour him as our God. We see what we may expect from him,

*In the time of trouble.*

We are brought perhaps by God's providence into great tribulation, so that "all his storms and billows go over us." But we need not therefore suppose that he has forsaken and forgotten us: for his word to us is, "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not

[f] Ps. cxiv. 1—7. [g] Exod. xv. 13—17. [h] Zech. iv. 7—9.

no overflow thee; for I am the Lord thy God, the Holy One of Israel thy Saviour[i]." The greater our trials are, the richer will be the manifestations of his love and mercy: his consolations will abound, not only according to, but far above, all our afflictions. This is the very improvement which the prophet Habakkuk made of the history before us. He expatiates upon the event, as if he had himself been an eye-witness of it: "I saw the tents of Cushan in affliction; and the curtains of the land of Midian did tremble. Was the Lord displeased against the rivers? was thine anger against the rivers? was thy wrath against the sea, that thou didst ride upon thine horses, and thy chariots of salvation? The mountains saw thee, and they trembled; the overflowing of the water passed by; the deep uttered his voice, and lifted up his hands on high. Thou wentest forth for the salvation of thy people, even for salvation with thine anointed. Thou didst walk through the sea with thine horses, through the heap of great waters." Then he adds, "Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vine; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls; yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation[k]."]

We see also what we may expect from Him,

*In the hour of death*—

[The passage of the Israelites through Jordan is not improperly considered as an emblem of the Christian's transition from the dreary wilderness of this world to the Canaan that is above. And when the time is arrived for passing by that unknown, untrodden path, we are apt to fear lest we should sink in the deep waters, and never attain the wished-for end. But God has promised to be with us, to "make the depths of the sea a way for the ransomed to pass over[l]," and to bring us in safety to the land that floweth with milk and honey. "When therefore we walk through the shadow of death, we need to fear no evil:" yea rather we may rest assured that "God will perfect that which concerneth us," and "preserve us safely unto his heavenly kingdom."]

IMPROVEMENT—

1. Let us mark, and bear in remembrance, God's mercies towards us—

[There is not any one who, if he had marked the dispensations of God towards himself, might not find many occasions for erecting monuments to his praise: nor is there any thing which will be more conducive to our comfort; since every past mercy may

[i] Isai. xliii. 2, 3.
[k] Hab. iii. 7, 8, 13, 15, 17, 18.
[l] Isai. li. 9—11.

may be considered as a pledge of future blessings. The Psalmist's mode of arguing may safely be adopted by every child of God: "Thou hast delivered my soul from death: wilt not thou deliver my feet from falling, that I may walk before the Lord in the land of the living[m]?" Set up then within your own bosoms an Eben-ezer, whenever God vouchsafes to favour you with any peculiar deliverances[n]: then will you have within yourselves a never-failing source of comfort, and an irresistible incentive to "fear the Lord."]

2. Let us endeavour to transmit the knowledge of his goodness to the latest generations—

[We should encourage young people to seek instruction, and should be glad of every thing that may afford us an occasion of making known to them the wonders of redeeming love. The whole scene of God's dispensations towards Israel, from their first deliverance out of Egypt to their final possession of the promised land, was figurative of our redemption by Christ Jesus: and it is worthy of observation, that this was strongly marked at the commencement and conclusion of their journey. The night before they set out from Egypt, they feasted on the Paschal lamb: and they entered into Canaan, forty years afterwards, *four days before* the Passover, that is, precisely on the day when the law required them to set apart the Paschal lamb for the approaching festival[o]. Thus was it intimated to them that our redemption from first to last is the fruit of Christ's sacrifice: on that must we feed in order to obtain deliverance; and even in heaven itself must we ascribe the glory of our salvation "to Him who loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood." Let us then labour to diffuse this saving knowledge, as opportunity shall offer, that our fellow-creatures may reap the benefits designed for them, and God may have the glory due unto his name.]

[m] Ps. lvi. 13. [n] 1 Sam. vii. 12.
[o] Compare Ex. xii. 3, 6. with Josh. iv. 19. & v. 10.

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## CLXIV.

### THE TAKING OF JERICHO.

Josh. vi. 20, 21. *So the people shouted when the priests blew with the trumpets: and it came to pass, when the people heard the sound of the trumpet, and the people shouted with a great shout, that the wall fell down flat, so that the people went up into the city, every man straight before him, and they took the city: and they utterly destroyed all that was in the city, both man and woman, young and old, and ox, and sheep, and ass, with the edge of the sword.*

THE

THE promises of God, though often delayed beyond the time that our impatient spirits would fix for their accomplishment, are always fulfilled in their season. The period at which God promised to Abraham that he would bring forth his posterity out of Egypt, was at the end of 430 years. During the latter part of that time the afflictions of the people increased beyond measure; yet was their deliverance neither accelerated nor delayed: but at the precise period that God had fixed in his eternal counsels, and had revealed to Abraham, even "on the self-same day, they were brought forth" from their bondage*. They would doubtless have been brought also into the full possession of the promised land if they had not provoked God to transfer to their children the mercies which they had treated with contempt. The space of forty years was allotted for that generation to wander, and to die, in the wilderness. During that time a new generation arose; and to them God fulfilled his word: he led them in a miraculous manner into Canaan, as we have seen: and now began to subdue their enemies before them. The first place which they were to conquer, was Jericho, a city of great strength; the taking of which is the subject for our present consideration.

We shall notice three things;

I. The preparations for the siege—

One would naturally suppose that they would instantly avail themselves of the terror which their miraculous passage through Jordan had inspired; and that, after fortifying their own camp, they would proceed to construct works for the capture of the city. But behold! instead of engaging in any such labours, they address themselves to works of a very different nature, suited only to a season of profound peace—

1. They renew the ordinance of circumcision—

[This ordinance had been entirely neglected in the wilderness;

* Exod. xii. 51.

ness; so that, with the exception of those who had not attained the age of twenty at their departure from Egypt, all were uncircumcised. Their first object therefore, after entering into the promised land, was, to renew their covenant with God by circumcision[b]. But was this a time for such an ordinance, when they would thereby disable themselves for war, or even for repelling an assault in case their enemies should attack them? Was it wise, or was it right, to act thus at so critical a juncture? Was it not a tempting of God, rather than a service that could be pleasing in his sight? No: it was commanded by Jehovah himself; and was *therefore* commanded, because God would make them to know that HE was their defence; and, that to mortify sin and surrender up themselves to him, was the surest road to victory. It was not by human policy or strength that they were to prevail, but by *his* care and *his* power: and whatever was most suited to obtain his favour, was most calculated to insure success.]

2. They keep the feast of passover[c]—

[This ordinance also had been neglected in the wilderness: and, in renewing it, they brought to their remembrance God's gracious interpositions for them at their departure from Egypt, and expressed their conviction, that their whole security depended on the blood of that great sacrifice which should in due time be offered. How strange does such an occupation appear, when the delay occasioned by it might give time for the arrival of succours to the besieged city! But, to those who know what interest God takes in the welfare of his people, this time would appear to be spent to the greatest possible advantage. And, though *we*, who are not to expect miraculous interpositions, should not be justified in following *literally* the example of Israel on this occasion, yet would it be well if we were more conformed to it *in spirit*: for assuredly, whatever difficulties or dangers we are in, it is our wisdom *first* to betake ourselves unto prayer, and, by renewed exercises of faith on the Lord Jesus, to secure the favour and protection of our God.]

. The wisdom of the preparations appears, in that they secured,

II. The fall of the city—

The manner in which it was taken was indeed surprising—

[The armed men were appointed to go round the city in perfect silence[d], once every day for six successive days; and, on the seventh day, they were to compass it seven times. In the midst of this procession the ark was to be carried by the priests, and

[b] Josh. v. 2—9. [c] ib. ver. 10. [d] ver. 10.

and to be preceded by seven priests with "trumpets of rams' horns," (or rather with the trumpets of jubilee[e],) which they were to sound during the whole procession. On the seventh day, at the seventh time of compassing the city, the army, on a signal given, were to shout: and behold, no sooner did they shout, than the walls on every side fell down flat, opening a ready way of access for the hosts of Israel, and causing the disconcerted men of Jericho to fall an easy prey to their invaders.]

It is also replete with instruction—

[We are not warranted perhaps to speak of this event as *typical:* nevertheless it was doubtless intended to convey most important instruction to all succeeding ages; and to shew to them, how easily God can make a way for the accomplishment of his own purposes, and for the salvation of his own people. If it did not typify, it certainly well illustrates, the victories which the Gospel was to obtain over all the principalities and powers of earth and hell. No human force was used: nothing but the sound of the Gospel trumpet prevailed for the subversion of Satan's kingdom. Though preached by men of no education, it proved effectual for the destruction of idolatry, and the establishment of the Redeemer's power, throughout the earth. In like manner at this time it prevails over the lusts and prejudices of mankind: the publication of it is committed to weak and sinful men, who go forth in Jehovah's name to subdue the world to the obedience of faith: and though "the weapons of our warfare are not carnal," nor such as appear likely to be wielded with success, yet are they "mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds," and to the "bringing" of, not only the actions, but even "the thoughts, of men, into captivity to the obedience of Christ[f]." As for the weakness of the instruments, God has selected such on purpose, "that the excellency of the power may appear to be of him[g]." His voice to us is the same in all his wonders both of Providence and Grace; "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts[h]."]

The next thing which calls for our attention is,

## III. The destruction of the inhabitants—

[With the exception of Rahab and her family, for whose preservation the word of the spies was pledged, every human being, old and young, male and female, was destroyed. Even the beasts also of every kind were destroyed, and the whole city was burnt with fire. Nothing was preserved but the silver and gold,

[e] Rams' horns being solid, would be unfit for the purpose. The other seems the preferable translation. See Numb. x. 1—10.

[f] 2 Cor. x. 4, 5. [g] 2 Cor. iv. 7. [h] Zech. iii. 6.

gold, and brass and iron, which were to be put into the treasury of the Lord for the use of his sanctuary.

Now in this indiscriminate slaughter we are apt to find occasion of offence, as though we thought ourselves more merciful than God. But were not these people the enemies of Jehovah? and had he not a right to cut them off in any way he pleased? If he had taken them away by an earthquake or a pestilence, or had cut them off, as he did the Egyptian first-born and the Assyrian army, by the hand of an Angel, we should have bowed to his sovereignty, and confessed him just: but because he used his own people as the executioners of his vengeance, we are ready to accuse both them and him of inhumanity and injustice. But we are sure that the Judge of all the earth will do right; and that whatever is done by his command is right, whether we can discern the reasons of that command or not. With respect to this particular act, if there was severity in it towards them, there was goodness in it, yea great goodness, towards the world at large: for it has shewn the danger of unbelief and impenitence in such awful colours, that the proudest and most obdurate must tremble. The inhabitants at first were certainly filled with terror and dismay: but probably when they saw for six successive days nothing but an empty parade, it is probable they would begin to think themselves secure. At the appointed time however the judgment came; and *that* in a way that they did not at all expect. And thus will it be towards impenitent transgressors. They may imagine that the delay of God's judgments warrants them to expect impunity in the ways of sin: but "when they are saying, Peace and safety, sudden destruction will come upon them as travail upon a woman with child, and they shall not escape."]

From this part of divine history we may LEARN,

1. The excellence of faith—

[What was the principle which enabled the Israelites to manifest such composure in the presence of their enemies, and to forbear the use of all common means either for the preservation of themselves or for the destruction of their enemies? It was faith. And so says an inspired writer; "By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they were compassed about seven days[i]." This is the principle which will carry us through all difficulties, and enable us to triumph over all our adversaries. Under the influence of this, our first care in every situation will be to serve and honour God. In the path of duty, we shall feel no fear about our ultimate success. The means which God has appointed we shall use, and none other. If they appear wholly unsuited to the end, we shall not on that account despond; but

[i] Heb. xi. 30.

but shall expect his gracious interposition in his own time and way, assured that He will make the weakest and most contemptible of Beings to confound the honourable, and to overcome the mighty[k]. Let us then cultivate this principle, and go forth to our warfare "strong in the Lord and in the power of his might."]

2. The benefit of enlisting under the banners of Christ—

[Christ revealed himself to Joshua under the appearance of a man, and professed himself "the Captain of the Lord's host[l]." It was he who directed Joshua how to conduct the siege, and "gave the city of Jericho into his hand[m]." And who but He is "the Captain of *our* salvation?" Who but He can guide us aright in our spiritual warfare, or give us success in it? Truly, if we be made "more than conquerors, it must be through Him that loved us[n]," and gave himself for us. To him will we direct you in every part of your warfare. Do nothing without first asking counsel of him; attempt nothing, but in his strength: and doubt not but that in all your conflicts you shall have reason to say, "Thanks be unto God who hath always caused us to triumph" hitherto, and will "give us everlasting victory through our Lord Jesus Christ[o]."]

[k] 1 Cor. i. 27, 28. [l] Josh. v. 13—15. [m] ver. 2.
[n] Rom. viii. 37. [o] 2 Cor. ii. 14. & 1 Cor. xv. 57.

## CLXV.

### ISRAEL DISCOMFITED BY THE MEN OF AI.*

Josh. vii. 8. *O Lord, what shall I say, when Israel turneth their backs before their enemies!*

UNINTERRUPTED properity is not to be expected in this changeable and sinful world. Even the most favoured of mankind must have some trials; nor is there any season when they can presume to say, "My mountain standeth strong; I shall not be moved." If at any time Joshua and Israel might adopt this language, it was immediately after they had entered on the possession of the promised land, and had received an earnest of the complete enjoyment of it by the miraculous destruction of the walls of Jericho. Yet behold, scarcely had they tasted the first-fruits of God's mercy, before a cup of bitterness was put into their hands; which made them regret

* Fast-day Sermon for disappointments and defeats in war.

regret that they had ever attempted the conquest of the land.

In an attack upon Ai, a detachment of Israelites had been defeated with the loss of thirty-six men: and this filled them all with such terror and dismay, that the whole nation, not excepting Joshua himself, gave way to despondency. Of this we have an account in the passage before us: to elucidate which, we shall notice,

I. The discomfiture of Israel—

Their mode of proceeding to the attack of Ai was far from right—

[Having so easily vanquished a much larger and stronger city, they held Ai in contempt, and concluded of course that God must interpose for them just as he had done in the former case. Hence they say, "Let us send only about two or three thousand thither, and not make all the people to labour thither." Now in this they were guilty of very *great presumption*. To confide in God was right; but to expect his aid, whilst they neglected to use their own endeavours, was highly presumptuous. And what excuse had they; what plea? None, except that they did not choose to *fatigue themselves* with the march. They did not even consult God respecting it; but acted purely from their own conceit. What was this, but to tempt God? And how could they hope to succeed, when acting in such a way?

However favoured any man may have been with divine succour and protection, if he presume upon it, and enter into temptation without necessity, and conceive that because his spiritual enemies appear weak, he shall of necessity overcome them; if he neglect to use the proper means of grace, such as searching the Scriptures and prayer to God, he shall fall: God will leave him to himself, that he may learn by bitter experience his own weakness, and "no more be high-minded, but fear[a]"———]

But their discomfiture was owing to another cause—

[God had forbidden that any one should take to himself any of the spoils of Jericho: but one man, (how astonishing was it that *only* one amongst all the hosts of Israel was found to transgress the command!) tempted by the sight of a costly Babylonish garment and some silver, and a wedge of gold, secreted them for

[a] This is taught us in Phil. ii. 12, 13. which says, "Work, &c. and God will render your efforts effectual: but work, not with self-confidence, but with fear and trembling, because all your strength is in God; and if by pride or negligence you provoke him to withhold his aid, you can never succeed."

for his own use[b]. This sin was imputed to the whole nation, and visited upon them all. God had declared, that, if any such iniquity were committed, the whole camp of Israel, as well as the guilty individual, should be accursed[c]; and now the curse was inflicted upon all; so that if the whole host of Israel had gone against Ai, they would have been discomfited, even as the small detachment was. To this the failure of the expedition is ascribed by God himself[d].

And to what are we to ascribe the calamities inflicted on our nation, the reverses experienced, and the losses sustained, in this long-protracted war? Is it not to our sins, which have incensed God against us? We all acknowledge the greatness of our *national* sins, but forget to notice our own *personal* iniquities; whereas, if we saw every thing as God sees it, we should probably see, that our own personal guilt has contributed in no small degree to bring down the divine judgments upon us. Because we are mere individuals, we think that our transgressions can have had but little influence in matters of this kind: but did not Saul's violation of the covenant he had made with the Gibeonites, occasion, many years afterwards, a famine of three years' continuance[e]? And did not David's numbering of the people occasion a pestilence, to the destruction of seventy thousand of his subjects[f]? But these offenders, it may be said, were kings; whereas *we* are obscure individuals:—and was not Achan an obscure individual? Yet behold, how one single act of sin, an act too which would not have been considered as very heinous amongst ourselves, stopped in a moment the course of Israel's victories, and turned them into shameful defeat! Let this point be duly considered in reference to ourselves; and let us learn, that abstinence from sin is an act no less of patriotism, than of piety.]

The defeat coming so unexpected, we do not wonder at,

II. Joshua's distress—

His conduct on this occasion was by no means unexceptionable—

[*The manner in which he complained to God* reflected even upon the Deity himself; "O Lord God, wherefore hast thou at all brought this people over Jordan, to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites to destroy us?" Alas! alas! Is this Joshua, that thus accuses the Most High God of cruelty and treachery? Lord, what is man? What will not the best of men do, if left by thee to the workings of their own corruption! Such had been the language of the murmuring Israelites on many occasions:

[b] ver. 21. [c] Josh. vi. 18. [d] ver. 11, 12.
[e] 2 Sam. xxi. 1. [f] 2 Sam. xxiv. 10—15.

sions: but we readily confess that Joshua, though he spake their sentiments, was by no means actuated by their rebellious spirit: yet he was wrong in entertaining for a moment such a thought. *His distrust of God also* was highly unbecoming; "Would to God we had been content, and dwelt on the other side Jordan!" What, dost thou so readily relinquish the possession of Canaan, because of this single check? Thou art afraid that "all the inhabitants of the land, hearing of this defeat, will be emboldened to environ you around, and to cut off the name of Israel from the earth:" but hast thou so soon forgotten all the wonders that God has wrought in order to bring thee into Canaan, and all that he has promised in relation to the ultimate possession of it? "Is God's hand shortened, that he cannot save, or his ear heavy, that he cannot hear?" "Has he at last forgotten to be gracious, and shut up his loving-kindness in displeasure?" Alas! Joshua, "this is thine infirmity." But it is an infirmity incident to the best of men under great and unexpected misfortunes. We are but too apt to give way to murmuring and desponding thoughts, both in relation to our temporal and spiritual concerns, when we should be rather encouraging ourselves with the recollection of past mercies, and pleading with God his promises of more effectual aid — — —]

Yet on the whole there was much in it to be admired—

[We cannot but highly applaud *the concern he expressed for the loss of so many lives.* Common Generals would have accounted the loss of thirty-six men as nothing: but "the blood of Israel was precious in the sight" of Joshua. We might have expected that he would have blamed the spies for deceiving him in relation to the strength of the city; and have punished the soldiers for cowardice: but he viewed the hand of God, rather than of man, in this disaster: and this led to (what also we much admire) *his humiliation before God on account of it.* This was very deep: "he rent his clothes, and fell to the earth upon his face before the ark of the Lord until the even-tide, he and the elders of Israel, and put dust upon their heads[g]." He had seen on many occasions how Moses and Aaron had succeeded in averting the divine displeasure from the people; and, in concert with the elders, he now tried the same means: and we may confidently say, that, if all the hosts of Israel had been defeated, this was the sure way to retrieve their affairs. But *his tender regard for the honour of God* was that which eminently distinguished him on this occasion; "O Lord, what wilt thou do unto thy great name[h]?" This was the plea which Moses had often used[i], and to which God had paid especial regard[k]: and the man

[g] ver. 6. [h] ver. 9. [i] Exod. xxxii. 12. Numb. xiv. 15, 16.
[k] Ezek. xx. 9.

man that feels it in his soul, and urges it in sincerity and truth, can never be ultimately foiled.

O that such were the disposition and conduct of our whole nation at this time! But alas! we hear of hundreds slaughtered, without any emotion. We have fasts appointed; but how few are there who observe them with such humiliation as that before us! It is true, the honour of God's name, I fear, is but little interested in our success: perhaps it is rather interested in the destruction of such an ungrateful and rebellious people as we are. But in relation to his Church and the advancement of religion amongst us, his honour is concerned; because he has bestowed on us advantages equal, if not superior, to any that are enjoyed elsewhere on the face of the whole earth. Here then we may, and should plead the honour of his name: he expects us to lay to heart the abounding of iniquity in the midst of us; and takes it ill at our hands that there are so few who "mourn for the afflictions of Joseph[l]," and "cry for the abominations of Israel[m]." Let, however, the example of Joshua and the elders be impressed upon our minds, and serve as a pattern for our future imitation.]

IMPROVEMENT—

[Let us not confine our attention to public calamities, but turn it to those afflictions which are personal and domestic. In this history we may behold *the source* and *remedy* of all the evil that can come upon us.

That God, in some particular case, may afflict his people, as he did Job, for the magnifying of his own power, and the furtherance of their welfare, we acknowledge: but yet we never can err in tracing our afflictions to sin, as their procuring cause: and, if only they be the means of discovering and mortifying our corruptions, we shall have reason to number them amongst the richest mercies we ever received — — —

Let us then inquire of the Lord, "Wherefore he contendeth with us?" Let us set ourselves diligently to search out our iniquities; and let us beg of God to discover them to us, that no one sin may remain unrepented of and unmortified.

If in any thing we have been overcome by our spiritual enemies, let us not reflect upon God, as though *he* had tempted us to sin; nor, on the other hand, let us distrust him, as though he were either unable or unwilling to deliver us: but let us humble ourselves before him, remembering that he is still full of compassion and mercy; and relying on that gracious invitation, "Return ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings, and love you freely."]

[l] Am. vi. 6. [m] Ezek. ix. 4.

## CLXVI.

### ACHAN'S GUILT AND PUNISHMENT.

Josh. vii. 19, 20. *And Joshua said unto Achan, My son, give, I pray thee, glory to the Lord God of Israel, and make confession unto him; and tell me now what thou hast done; hide it not from me. And Achan answered Joshua, and said, Indeed I have sinned against the Lord God of Israel, and thus and thus have I done.*

THE rise, and progress, and termination of sin afford as interesting a subject, as any that can be presented to our view. It is exhibited to us by St. James in few words, and with remarkable precision: "Man is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed: then, when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin; and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death[a]." Here we see the whole process: the inward corruption of the heart is first drawn forth by some enticing object; the desire of gratification is then formed, and the determination to attain it fixed. Then comes the act whereby it is attained; and then death, the bitter consequence of sin, inevitably follows. On this passage the history before us is an instructive comment. Achan saw a goodly Babylonish garment, with two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold, and coveted them: then he took them, contrary to the divine command; and then the penalty of his transgression was inflicted on him.

In discoursing on this event, we would call your attention to,

I. His guilt—

This act of his had been perpetrated with so much caution, that it was unperceived by any human being. The consequences of it were felt in the Divine displeasure; but what evil had been committed, or by whom, no one knew. How then was it detected? How was the offence brought home to Achan? His guilt must be proved, before he can be punished: nay, there must be two witnesses, or testimony equivalent

[a] Jam. i. 14, 15.

equivalent to that of two witnesses, before he can be put to death[b]. Behold then by what means his guilt was ascertained: it was proved,

1. From unquestionable testimony—

[Though the matter was altogether hidden from man, it was known to the omniscient, omnipresent God. "The darkness is no darkness to him; but the night and the day are both alike." God's eye was upon him, whilst he thought that no eye could see him: and God himself gave the information against him. He declared to Joshua what the true reason was of his displeasure, and of Israel's defeat. But though he revealed *the fact*, he did not name *the person* that had committed it, but left that to be discovered in a way more impressive to the nation, and more merciful to the offender, inasmuch as it gave him time for repentance and voluntary acknowledgment before him, first, by *their tribes*, that he might point out to which tribe the offender belonged; then, by *their families*; then, by *their households*; and lastly, by *their individual persons*: and thus by four successive lots he fastened upon Achan as the guilty person. Never was there a more striking comment than this on those words of David, "Evil shall *hunt* the wicked man to overthrow him[c]." The offender was out of sight; but his steps were traced with unerring certainty: the first lot shewed, that his scent, if I may so express myself, was found; and, when found, was followed with undeviating steadiness, and irresistible rapidity; till at last the criminal was seized, a lawful prey, a just victim to the divine displeasure.]

2. From personal confession—

[The testimony of God would of itself have been sufficient; because he could neither deceive nor be deceived. But, as it was intended that the offender should be made a public monument of divine justice, and be held up as a warning to the whole nation, it was desirable that other proofs of Achan's guilt should be adduced, sufficient to convince the most scrupulous, and satisfy the most partial. Behold then, Achan himself supplies a testimony which none could controvert or doubt: he bears witness against himself.

Joshua, assured that God had fixed upon the guilty person, intreats the offender to declare openly wherein he had transgressed. And here, we cannot but admire the tenderness of Joshua's address. He insults not over Achan, nor loads him with reproaches; but, as a compassionate father, beseeches him to acknowledge the truth of God's testimony, and to "give glory to him by confessing" his crime. This indeed was known to Joshua, and might have been *specified* by him; but it could not

[b] Deut. xvii. 6. [c] Ps. cxl. 11.

not be *proved*; and therefore he wishes to hear it from Achan's own mouth; more particularly as a confession of it would honour God in the sight of all; it would glorify his *omniscience* in discovering, his *holiness* in hating, and his *justice* in punishing the iniquity which had been committed.

Achan, convinced that any farther attempt to conceal his guilt would be in vain, confessed it, and *that* too with an ingenuousness and fulness, which would have given us hopes concerning him, if the confession had not been extorted from him by a previous discovery.

On this testimony, sentence might well have been passed and judgment executed. Nevertheless, that no doubt might remain on any mind, it was further desirable that his guilt should be ascertained also, as it eventually was,]

3. From corroborating facts—

[It has sometimes been found that persons have unjustly accused themselves: but it was not so in this case: for Achan, in confirmation of his word, told them where they might find the stolen property. A messenger is sent; the property is found; the proofs of his guilt are exhibited before the Lord and in the sight of all Israel. To this testimony nothing was wanting, nothing could be added. The truth of God was manifest, and the equity of his judgments was demonstrated: and nothing now remained but to execute on the offender the punishment he had deserved.]

Proceed we now to notice—

II. His punishment—

God had before declared that any person who should take to himself any part of the spoils of Jericho should be accursed[d]: and, after the transgression had been committed, he declared that he would no more be with his people till they should have destroyed the accursed person, and every thing belonging to him, from among them[e]. No option therefore remained to Joshua, but to execute the sentence according to God's command.

The sentence, though dreadful, was not too severe—

[Achan, with all his children, and his cattle, were stoned to death, and afterwards, with his tent and stolen property and every thing belonging to him, consumed by fire. Now it is true, that God had expressly forbidden that parents or children should be put to death for each other's iniquities[f]: but God is not restrained by the laws which he gives to man; he may alter or

[d] Josh. vi. 18, 19. [e] ver. 12, 13, 15. [f] Deut. xxiv. 16.

or reverse them as he sees good: and in the present instance he was fully justified in the sentence he pronounced. The sin that had been committed, was peculiarly heinous. View it *in itself;* it was a *sacrilegious* robbing of God, who had ordered the gold and the silver to be appropriated to his use in the sanctuary. View it in *its circumstances;* it was committed *immediately after* a most solemn surrender of himself to God by *circumcision and at the paschal feast,* and *at the very instant that God had magnified his power and love* in causing the walls of Jericho to fall at the sound of rams' horns and the people's shout. Had Achan scaled the walls of Jericho and gained the spoils by his own sword at the peril of his life, it would have been some little extenuation of his crime; but God had disarmed his enemies, and made them like sheep for the slaughter: and therefore to rob him of the spoils was the basest *ingratitude.* In a word, it was direct *atheism;* for the very idea that he could hide the matter from God was a practical denial of his omnipresence. View it, lastly, in *its effects;* what evil it had brought upon the whole nation; what a calamitous defeat, accompanied with the loss of six and thirty Israelites; and what inconceivable misery it would have entailed upon the whole nation, if it had not been duly punished, even the entire loss of God's favour, and the utter destruction of all the people. View the transaction, I say, in this light, and the punishment, awful as it was, will be acknowledged just: he who sought in this manner the destruction of every family in Israel, might well be destroyed together with his own family.

If our proud heart still rise against the sentence, let us silence every objection with this unanswerable question, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?"]

## The execution of it was calculated to produce the best effects—

[It was necessary that, in the commencement of this new scene of things, the people should know what a God they had to do with; and that, whilst they learned from his mercies how greatly he was to be loved, they might learn also from his judgments how greatly he was to be feared. This lesson they were now effectually taught: they could not but see that "God is greatly to be feared, and to be had in reverence by all them that are round about him." To impress this lesson more deeply on their minds, an heap of stones was raised over the ashes of this unhappy family; that, as a lasting memorial of God's indignation against sin, it might declare to all future generations, that "it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the Living God."

Now if we consider what incalculable benefit was likely to arise, not only to the people then existing but to all future generations, from that act of severity, and that the good issuing from it

it would in many instances be, not merely temporal in relation to their bodies, but spiritual also and eternal in relation to their souls, we shall see that severity to *them* was kindness to *millions;* and that therefore the punishment inflicted on them comported no less with the goodness of God than with the sterner rights of justice.]

That we may gather yet further instruction from the history, let us BEHOLD in it,

1. The deceitfulness of sin—

[Achan at first contemplated only the satisfaction he should feel in possessing the Babylonish garment, and the comforts which the gold and silver would procure for him. The ideas of shame and remorse and misery were hid from him; or, if they glanced through his mind, they appeared as visionary, and unworthy of any serious attention. But O! with what different thoughts did he contemplate his gains, when inquisition was made to discover the offender! or, if at first he thought that the chances were so much in his favour, as to preclude all fear of discovery, how would he begin to tremble when he saw that his own *tribe* was selected as containing the guilty person! How would his terror be increased when he saw his own *family* pointed out! and what dread would seize hold upon him when the lot fell upon his *household!* Methinks, when the different members of that household came before the Lord, it might have been seen clearly enough who the guilty person was, by the paleness of his cheeks and the trembling of his limbs. What now becomes of all his expected enjoyments, when once he is detected? With what different eyes does he view the garment and the money when brought forth before the people, from what he did when first he coveted them in the house of their owner! how glad would he now be if he could recall the act, which had thus brought him to shame and ruin! Thus then will it be with all who violate the laws of God. The seducer, the whoremonger, the adulterer, the thief, thinks of nothing at first but the pleasure he shall receive in the gratification of his lusts; and congratulates himself on the attainment of his wishes: but he has no sooner attained his object, than he begins to be filled with apprehensions of a discovery: he is carried on perhaps by the impetuosity of his passions; but he is a stranger to peace. Perhaps he silences his convictions, and follows his sinful ways without much compunction: but it will not be always so: there is a time coming when he will view his gratifications with other eyes; or if he be so blinded by the devil as to make light of sin unto the last, his illusions will vanish the very instant that his soul is departed from the body. For the most part, that is found true which is spoken of hypocrites in the book of Job; "Though wickedness be sweet in his mouth, though he hide it under

under his tongue; though he spare it, and forsake it not, but keep it still within his mouth; yet his meat in his bowels is turned, it is the gall of asps within him[g]." How awfully was this experienced by our first parents! When tempted to eat of the forbidden tree, they thought of nothing but the delicious flavour of the fruit, and the prospect of being made "wise as gods." But they were soon convinced, by bitter experience, that "to regard lying vanities was to forsake their own mercies." Some indeed, by continuance in sin, are become "past feeling, having their consciences seared as with an hot iron:" but death and judgment will speedily undeceive them, and the wrath of an almighty God shall teach them, that "sin was indeed exceeding sinful."]

## 2. The certainty of its exposure—

[It is profitable to observe how often God interposes to discover the hidden iniquities of mankind. Some sins in particular appear to engage him in more decided hostility against the perpetrators of them. I refer more especially to murder and adultery. The interest which the guilty persons feel in concealing their iniquity makes them as cautious as possible to prevent discovery: yet is their very caution oftentimes the cause of their detection. To such sinners we may almost universally address that solemn warning, "Be sure your sin will find you out." It not unfrequently happens that men are so harassed in their minds, as no longer to be able to conceal their guilt: like Judas, they cast back the wages of their iniquity, and court even death itself, by their own hand, or by the hand of a public executioner, as a relief from the torment of a guilty conscience. But be it so: they hide their wickedness from man: but can they hide it from God? Is there "any darkness or shadow of death where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves?" No: if they go up to heaven, or down to hell, or flee to the remotest parts of the earth, there does God behold them, and from thence will he bring them to judgment. In that day shall the book of his remembrance be opened, and men shall see the records of their own actions. Then shall the proofs of our guilt be exhibited before the assembled universe, and we shall be unable to utter one syllable in arrest of judgment. O that we could realize the thoughts of that day! What a day will it be, when the secrets of all hearts shall be exposed to view, and every hidden abomination be brought to light! Happy, happy they, who in that day shall be found to have an interest in Christ, and in whom his love and mercy shall be for ever magnified! Now since it is certain that our sins will sooner or later find us out, let us consider how we shall view them in that day: and, as we would not *now* commit a scandalous iniquity in the sight of a fellow-creature, lest

[g] Job xx. 12—14.

lest he should proclaim our wickedness, so let us bear in mind that there is One, "unto whom all things are naked and opened," and who has declared that he "will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and make manifest the counsels of the heart." Surely, however skilfully we conceal our abominations now, he will be a swift witness against us in that day to our everlasting confusion.]

3. The awfulness of its award—

[Who does not shudder at the thought of that vengeance which was executed on Achan and his family? Who does not see how hot the indignation of God against sin was, when the sin of one single person prevailed more to incense him against the whole nation, than the innocence of the whole nation did to pacify his wrath against the individual, and when nothing but the most signal punishment of the individual could reconcile him to the nation to which he belonged? Yet was all this but a faint shadow of the indignation which he will manifest in a future world. Surely we should profit from such a history as this: we should learn to dread the displeasure of the Almighty, and to glorify him now by an ingenuous confession, that he may not be glorified hereafter in our eternal condemnation.

Hear ye then, Brethren, what the weeping Prophet speaks to us in the name of the Lord: "Hear ye, and give ear; be not proud, for the Lord hath spoken. Give glory to the Lord your God, before he cause darkness, and before your feet stumble upon the dark mountains, and while ye look for light, he turn it into the shadow of death, and make it gross darkness. But, if ye will not hear, my soul shall weep in secret places for your pride; and mine eyes shall weep sore, and run down with tears" for the destruction and misery that shall come upon you[h]. Blessed be God, though Achan's confession did not avert his punishment, ours shall, provided it be truly ingenuous, and deeply penitential. The Lord Jesus Christ never yet spurned from his feet a weeping penitent. He shed his blood even for the chief of sinners, and "will save to the uttermost all who come unto God by him." But confession on our part is indispensable: his word to us is, "Return, thou backsliding sinner, saith the Lord, and I will not cause mine anger to fall upon you; for I am merciful, saith the Lord, and I will not keep anger for ever: *Only acknowledge thine iniquity*[i]." Let us but do this aright, and we shall soon be enabled to say with the Psalmist, "I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord; and so thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin."]

[h] Jer. xiii. 16, 17. [i] Jer. iii. 12, 13.

## CLXVII.

### JOSHUA'S LEAGUE WITH GIBEON.

Josh. ix. 15. *And Joshua made peace with them, and made a league with them, to let them live.*

IT is not uncommon for persons to harden themselves against God, and, like Ahaz, "in their distress to trespass yet more against the Lord*." The inhabitants of Canaan had been filled with terror and dismay even before the Israelites had passed over Jordan: yet they prepared to contend with the invading army, and to repel force by force. But when they saw that a passage was opened for Israel through Jordan, and that the walls of Jericho were thrown down by the sound of rams' horns, and that Ai also was vanquished, it might have been hoped that they would submit themselves to the God of Israel, and endeavour by penitence to avert the impending danger. This however was not the case: on the contrary, the different kings of the country formed a confederacy, to oppose with their united power those whom they despaired of withstanding by their separate exertions. One people indeed ventured to stem the tide: the Gibeonites determined to shun the storm which they could not avert: accordingly they sent some of their chief men to make a league with Joshua.

This league is the subject of our present consideration: and we shall notice it, with a view to,

I. Moral instruction—

Two things in particular require our attention;

1. The deceit they practised—

[The device which they executed was extremely subtle and ingenious. They knew that God had given to the Israelites a command to extirpate the seven nations of Canaan: and they saw by the manner in which Jericho and Ai had fallen, that there was no hope of resisting them with success. They therefore sent some of their chief men, with instruction to feign themselves ambassadors from a very distant nation, and in a very submissive manner to intreat that they might not be extirpated also. Whatever

* 2 Chron. xxviii. 22.

ever terms Joshua chose to impose, they were ready to accede to, provided they might but return to their country assured on the oath of Israel that they should be permitted to live. That their story might have the appearance of truth, "they took old sacks, old and rent leathern wine-bottles, old shoes, clouted upon their feet, and old garments, and, for their provision, bread that was dry and mouldy," pretending that every thing was new when they set out from home, but that, by reason of the length of their journey, it had been reduced to the state in which it then was. They professed a great regard for the God of Israel whom they feared, having heard of all the wonders he had wrought for his people in Egypt, and of the victorious manner in which he had enabled them to prevail over the kings on the other side of Jordan. But respecting the miraculous passage through the river Jordan, or the fall of Jericho and Ai, they said not a word; because they would have it supposed that their country was so far distant as not to admit of such recent events being known there.

But this falsehood was altogether unjustifiable. It is true, the very existence of their nation apparently depended on it; and to deceive an enemy may in some cases be allowable: but here was falsehood, direct, palpable, systematic falsehood: and, as is usually the case, having begun with one falsehood, (That they were come from a far country,) they were forced to utter a multitude of others to support it. Nothing could justify this: and, if they had been truly pious, they would have preferred death before it. Their better way would certainly have been, to declare the whole truth, and to implore Joshua's intercession with God to spare their lives, and to instruct them in the knowledge of his ways. This, we can have no doubt, would have succeeded, though no provision was made for such an event in the general orders which God had given to Israel. The exception of sparing those who opened their gates related to distant nations only, and not to those within the borders of the promised land[b]. Yet God, as a God of mercy, would have spared them: or, if he had not, it would have been better for them to die, than to preserve their lives by falsehood: for the sentence of God against liars, without any respect to the occasion of their lies, is, that "they shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone; which is the second death[c]."]

## 2. The league that Joshua made with them—

[Joshua, though some suspicion was intimated in the first instance[d], was too easily imposed upon: (for those who are themselves guileless, are least suspicious of guile in others:) he formed his judgment from the circumstances that were before him, and made up his mind without consulting God[e]. This in him

[b] Deut. xii. 10, 11, 15, 16. [c] Rev. xxi. 8. [d] ver. 7. [e] ver. 14.

him was faulty: both he and the elders were guilty of criminal neglect. To what purpose had God given them the Urim and Thummim, but that they might ascertain his will in all doubtful matters? and Eleazar, the high priest, was at hand; so that no delay would have been occasioned. To the same source may be traced innumerable errors of our own. We "lean to our own understandings," instead of seeking direction from God. To what purpose is it said, "In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct our paths[f]," if we do not avail ourselves of this privilege? Let us bear in mind, that there is nothing so great or so small, but it is our duty and our privilege to ask counsel of God respecting it.

But though we blame Joshua for so hastily concluding a covenant with the Gibeonites, we highly applaud him for adhering to his engagement: There might indeed have been much to say for rescinding the covenant: 'He had been imposed upon: they were not the people whom they had represented themselves to be; nor were their cities out of the precincts of the promised land.' Still however, "he had sworn to them by the Lord God of Israel;" and therefore he considered the whole nation as pledged to fulfil the covenant; nor would he suffer the congregation to execute upon them the vengeance which they meditated. This was doubtless the proper line of conduct for him to pursue. If he had rescinded his covenant, the whole people of Canaan would have represented him as a violator of his engagements: it was therefore better to fulfil his hasty and unadvised agreement, than by departing from it to give occasion to the enemies of God to blaspheme. From hence we may learn our duty on all such occasions. Joshua had erred through haste, and a neglect of properly consulting God; and therefore it was right to abide the consequences. Had his oath indeed been like Herod's, duty would have required him to violate it; because an engagement to commit murder could not be binding upon any man: but as there was no such obstacle to the performance of his vows in the present instance, he acted the part of an upright man, who "sweareth to his neighbour, and changeth not[g]." Nevertheless it was not necessary that he should go beyond his agreement. All that he had promised, was, to spare their lives[h]: that therefore he adhered to: but as they had deceived him, and as it was necessary to pacify the congregation who were offended at the covenant, he reduced them all to a state of servitude, and made them hewers of wood and drawers of water to the whole congregation in the house of the Lord. This satisfied all parties; and turned even the error which he had committed, into a public benefit.]

Thus have we considered the subject with a view to

[f] Prov. iii. 5, 6. [g] Ps. xv. 4. [h] The text, with ver. 20.

to moral instruction, particularly in reference to *the evil of falsehood, and the importance of seeking direction from God*, and *the indispensable necessity of fulfilling our engagements*. We shall now consider it with a view to,

II. Religious improvement—

It is thought by most commentators that the league made with Gibeon was typical of the admission of the Gentiles into the Christian Church: but without insisting upon that, we may justly deduce from it the following instructions:

1. That we ought without delay to seek the salvation of our souls—

[The Gibeonites did not wait till Joshua had invested their cities, but, whilst he was yet at a distance, sent to desire conditions of peace. They believed that God had given the whole land to Israel, and had ordered them to slay all the inhabitants, and that it was impossible to oppose them with success. They knew also that there was abundant evidence of God's power to execute all that his wisdom had decreed[j]. Therefore they lost no time in seeking to arrest the hand of vengeance, and to obtain life on any terms. Did they then act thus for the life of their bodies, and shall not we for the life of our souls? Have not we as clear evidence of God's determination to destroy all the ungodly, as they had of the gift of Canaan to Israel? and are not the judgments inflicted on the rebel angels, on the old world, on the cities of the plain, and of the Jews themselves at this hour, as clear proofs of God's determination to fulfil his word? I say then, Learn of these heathens: learn to come to JESUS ere it be too late. Stay not till you are besieged by sickness and death; but now, whilst the enemy appears distant, seek a covenant of peace and life. You need not cover your design with falsehoods, but rather declare the whole truth: and come *at first*, as they did *after their imposture was detected*; "Behold, we are in thine hand: as it seemeth good and right unto thee to do unto us, do[k]."]

2. That no man shall seek for mercy in vain—

[The Gibeonites, though they obtained mercy by fraud, were spared from a respect for the honour of the God of Israel. Notwithstanding Joshua had been commanded to extirpate all, yet were they spared, when once he had inadvertently passed his word in their favour. And shall not *we* be spared if we apply to the true Joshua? The Lord Jesus to whom we apply "came into

[j] ver. 24. [k] ver. 25.

into the world, *not to condemn the world*, but that the world through him might be saved." So far therefore is mercy from being contrary to the ends of his mission, it is the very end for which he came, that he might "seek and save that which was lost." Nay more, he came not only to spare us, but to bring us into covenant with himself, that we might be numbered amongst his own peculiar people. Hear his own word, addressed to every one of us in his name by the prophet Isaiah; "Incline your ear, and come unto ME: hear, and your *soul* shall *live:* and I will *make an everlasting covenant with you*, even the sure mercies of David[l]." If you are inclined to doubt whether "he will take the children's bread, and cast it to such a dog as you;" learn from the Canaanitish woman, that your unworthiness shall be no bar to your admission to his favour: only, like her, believe in Jesus; and, like her, you shall assuredly find acceptance with him. Moreover, if Jesus once admit you into covenant with himself, not all the universe shall ever prevail upon him to violate his engagements with you. If at any time he appear to frown upon you, you may take his covenant, and plead it with him at the throne of grace; "Do not abhor us for *thy name sake;* do not *disgrace the throne of thy glory;* remember, *break not thy covenant with us*[m]." What astonishing pleas are here! And shall they be used in vain? Had *Joshua* such respect for the honour of God, that he would not violate his inadvertent covenant, and shall not JESUS fulfil the covenant which he has ratified with his blood? Surely none ever did, or ever shall, make application to him for mercy in vain.]

3. That, if we would obtain mercy, we must submit to the terms imposed upon us—

[The Gibeonites accounted it no great matter to cede their cities, and to spend their days in servitude, seeing that their lives were spared. And shall we think much of sacrificing any temporal interests, or of performing any self-denying duties, when we have reason to hope that God has spared the life of our souls? What if we be called to give up father and mother, and houses and lands, for Christ's sake; should we not "account them all as loss for Christ?" What if we be menaced with cruel torments and death for his sake; should we not say, "None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto me, so that I may but fulfil his will, and finish my course with joy?" Had the Gibeonites demurred, they had lost the benefit conferred upon them: and so shall we, if we refuse to comply with the terms assigned us; for "whoso loveth his life, shall lose it." If we look for mercy at the hands of Jesus, all that we have, and all that we are, must be the Lord's. Our whole life must be a life of self-denying obedience. Hear this then, ye Gibeonites, who

[l] Isai. lv. 3. [m] Jer. xiv. 22.

who desire a covenant of life and peace: these are the terms, and only these, that can ever be allowed you. But know ye this, that though they may appear hard to flesh and blood, they are not really hard: on the contrary, the service of God is perfect freedom; and it is "better to be a door-keeper in the house of your God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness." If then ye have been awakened from your heathenish security, whatever terrors may have brought you to the feet of Jesus, bless God for them: and whatever hardships ye may endure in the service of your Lord, bless God for them also. If only ye submit to God, and take part with his people here, you shall have your portion with them to all eternity.]

## CLXVIII.

### JOSHUA'S VICTORY OVER THE CONFEDERATE KINGS.

Josh. x. 24, 25. *And it came to pass, when they brought out those kings unto Joshua, that Joshua called for all the men of Israel, and said unto the captains of the men of war which went with him, Come near, put your feet upon the necks of these kings. And they came near, and put their feet upon the necks of them. And Joshua said unto them, Fear not, nor be dismayed; be strong, and of good courage; for thus shall the Lord do to all your enemies against whom ye fight.*

THE Jewish history, considered merely as an history, is the most wonderful, and most instructive, that ever was recorded: but considered as a shadow of things to come, it has an interest peculiar to itself. The attention which it excites, is not that of speculative curiosity, but of practical concern: and every one who desires to obtain favour with Israel's God, feels himself bound to study it, in order to learn from it the character of God, together with the duties and privileges of his chosen people.

Having had frequent occasion, in our discourses on the Pentateuch, to shew, that the figurative import of this history is not imaginary, but real; and that such an explanation of it is strongly intimated in the New Testament; we may dispense with any remarks of that kind at present, and proceed to notice, in reference to the Christian's warfare, the defeat of the five confederate kings by Joshua; a full

full account of which is given in the chapter before us.

The things which we shall more particularly refer to, are,

I. The occasion of the confederacy—

[The Gibeonites, who were a strong and powerful people, had made a league with Joshua, whilst all the other kingdoms of Canaan were determined to oppose him. This incensed all the other powers against them, especially their nearer neighbours, who considered it as betraying the common interest, and as facilitating the threatened subjugation of the whole country. To prevent the influence of such an example, and to punish those whom they regarded as traitors, five kings united their forces to go and smite Gibeon, before they should be able to obtain any assistance from their new ally. They accordingly went up with all possible expedition to attack the city, and to wreak their vengeance on its inhabitants.

Here then we may see what usually takes place when any of the enemies of Christ submit themselves to him. Their former friends and companions consider it as a defection from their standard, and a dereliction of their cause; and often resent it with no little acrimony[a]: ——— and though their opposition does not in all cases proceed to the same extremity, it never fails to shew itself in a way of contempt and ridicule[b]. Satan too is indignant at losing one of his vassals; and not only stimulates his subjects to commence hostilities against them[c], but labours by all possible wiles and devices to reduce them to their former bondage[d] — — — There is the same enmity against the cause of Christ existing now as ever. As "the kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers took counsel together, against the Lord, and against his Anointed[e]," in the days of old, and the same rage continued against all the Apostles and Disciples in after-ages[f], so must it be, and so it will be, as long as Satan shall be permitted to exert any influence over the minds of men[g]: earth and hell will combine against the Church of Christ; and every one that enters into covenant with Jesus, shall have a powerful confederacy to contend with[h].]

From the occasion of that confederacy, we proceed to notice,

II. The means by which it was defeated—

[Instantly, and with great importunity, did the Gibeonites make

[a] Isai. lix. 15. John xv. 19. Luke xii. 51—53.
[b] 1 Pet. iv. 4. [c] Eph. ii. 2. [d] Eph. vi. 11, 16. 1 Pet. v. 8.
[e] Ps. ii. 2. [f] Acts iv. 1—3. & v. 18, 40. & ix. 23.
[g] 2 Cor. iv. 4. 2 Tim. ii. 26.
[h] Gal. iv. 29. 2Tim. iii. 12. Eph. vi. 12

make application to Joshua for timely succour[l]. They rightly judged, that, having once made a covenant with them, he would afford them his effectual aid. Nor were they disappointed of their hope: for Joshua, without delay, gave orders to his whole army, and marched all night to their deliverance.

Such is the way in which Christians also must obtain deliverance. If they attempt to resist their enemies in their own strength, they will infallibly be vanquished: but if they betake themselves to prayer, they cannot but succeed. Prayer calls omnipotence to their aid: and while it is yet offering, God will both hear and answer it[k]. Behold the apostle Paul, how sorely he was beset, how grievously he was assaulted: yet scarcely had he been able thrice to repeat his cry for help, before the Lord answered him, "My grace is sufficient for thee:" and immediately you behold him triumphing, as if all his enemies were lying prostrate at his feet[l]. Thus the Christian, whatever confederacy be formed against him, has only to cry unto the Lord for help, saying, "I have no might against this great company that cometh against me, neither know I what to do;" and the victory will be no longer doubtful[m]: the devil himself could not stand before such a prayer as that, but would instantly be put to flight[n]. Joshua felt that there was danger of his coming too late: but no such danger exists in relation to the Christian; for his Lord is always near, a present, "a very present help in the time of trouble[o]."]

Let us next contemplate,

## III. The extent of that defeat—

[The confederate armies were discomfited in a moment, and the pursuit of them continued so long, that Joshua intreated that the sun and moon might be arrested in their career, in order to afford him light to finish the work he had begun[p]. And because the slaughter of them by the hand of Israel was not sufficient, God himself cast down great hail-stones upon them, and slew more than all the host of Israel had slain with the sword[q]. All the five kings also were taken, and, after the captains of Israel had put their feet upon their necks, were slain, and hanged up on trees, as accursed monuments of God's wrath and indignation. Thus complete was the destruction of Israel's enemies by Israel's God.

Thus shall the Christian also be enabled to say with the Apostle, "Thanks be unto God, who always causeth us to triumph in Christ!" When once he has entered into covenant with Christ, "sin shall no more have dominion over him:" "being Christ's, he shall be enabled to crucify the flesh with the affections

[l] ver. 6. [k] Isai. lxv. 24. [l] 2 Cor. xii. 7—9.
[m] 2 Chron. xx. 12, 15—17. [n] Jam. iv. 7.
[o] Ps. xlvi. 1. [p] ver. 12, 13. [q] ver. 10, 11.

affections and lusts:" yea, God will so give him the victory, that "Satan himself shall be *bruised under his feet* shortly[r]." See the victories granted to David in answer to his prayer: these were a counterpart of those recorded in the text, and of those also which every true Christian shall experience[s].]

It was not for the purpose of insulting over a vanquished enemy that Joshua ordered his captains to trample on their necks, but in order to shew unto Israel, what sentiments this victory should inspire; and to set before their eyes,

IV. The prospect it afforded them in all their future conflicts—

[Many conflicts yet remained for them, before the whole land would be completely subdued. But, however numerous or severe these conflicts might be, the people had no reason "to fear or be dismayed," since every enemy should be subdued before them in like manner, and be, as had long since been foretold, mere "bread for *them*[t]."

In like manner are *we* also taught to regard our victories as pledges of future and greater conquests. Whilst we are in this militant state, we shall find many enemies to encounter. Sometimes they may appear so formidable as almost to defy omnipotence itself: but we need not fear: there are at all times "more with us than with them:" we shall always have Jehovah himself on our side: and "if God be for us, who can be against us?" Our own weakness is no ground of fear; because God "will perfect his own strength in our weakness:" "instead of breaking the bruised reed or quenching the smoking flax, he will bring forth judgment unto victory." In this light then let us view the menaces and assaults of all our enemies: they shall only be the means of displaying and magnifying the power of our God. Only let us remember that encouraging direction, "Call upon me in the time of trouble, and I will hear thee, and thou shalt glorify me;" and then may we rest assured, that "no weapon which is formed against us shall prosper;" yea, we may defy all the powers of earth and hell ever "to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord[u]."]

APPLICATION—

1. To those who put discouragements in the way of repenting sinners—

[Few will acknowledge themselves to be persecutors of the Lord's people, though there is scarcely a more common character to be found. But know, that mocking is as painful to the mind as

[r] Rom. xvi. 20. [s] Ps. xviii. 4—10, 16—19, 36—40, 50.
[t] Numb. xiv. 9. [u] Isai. liv. 17. Rom. viii. 35—39.

as scourging is to the body[x]:" and "it were better to have a mill-stone hanged about your neck, and to be cast into the sea, than that you should offend one of Christ's little ones[y]" — — — If any think, that, because multitudes concur with them, they are the less in danger, I would remind them of Gibeon's enemies, and say, "Associate yourselves, and ye shall be broken in pieces; gird yourselves, and ye shall be broken in pieces[z]."]

2. To those who yield to discouragement—

[Think not of your own weakness, but of the power and grace of Christ. And if others cry out by reason of a confederacy, join not with them in their desponding apprehensions, but "sanctify the Lord of Hosts himself, and make him your fear, and him your dread[a]."]

[x] Heb. x. 33. & xi. 36.
[y] Matt. xviii. 6.
[z] Isai. viii. 9, 10.
[a] ib. ver. 12, 13.

## CLXIX.

### THE CONQUEST AND PARTITION OF CANAAN.

Josh. xi. 23. *So Joshua took the whole land, according to all that the Lord said unto Moses; and Joshua gave it for an inheritance unto Israel, according to their divisions by their tribes.*

THE promises of God, though often slow in their accomplishment, are sure to be fulfilled in due season. Abraham waited twenty years for the promised child, till, according to the course of nature, there was no hope that Sarah should ever become a mother; yet Isaac was born to him in due time. God promised to give him and to his posterity the land of Canaan; yet it was 430 years before his posterity were brought out of Egypt; and forty more before they entered into Canaan; and even then it was six more years before they obtained a quiet possession of it. Still however, the promise could not fail, nor did it fail in any particular. The accomplishment of that event is recorded in the words we have just read; which will naturally lead us to contemplate the *conquest* and *partition* of the promised land.

I. The conquest of the land—

Beautiful

Beautiful is the analogy between the warfare of the Israelites, and that which is maintained by every true Christian. We have had repeated occasion for this remark before; but the illustration of it admits of endless diversity.

Mark their warfare in its various stages—

[Behold *its commencement:* it began with wonderful interpositions of the Divine power in their behalf. The river Jordan opened to them a passage, as on dry land, at a time that it had overflowed all its banks: the walls of Jericho fell down at the sound of rams' horns, and the people's shout: and thus a footing for them was gained in a way that gave all possible encouragement to their future efforts. In *its progress* they were left more to their own personal exertions. Great combinations were formed against them; and they had sometimes to contend with powers, which seemed likely to overwhelm them [a]: at other seasons they enjoyed comparative rest; yet were they never without some enemies to combat, and some conflicts to maintain. God had told them, that he would "not drive out the Canaanites before them in one year, but by little and little;" that the beasts of the field should not multiply against them, and that their population might so increase as to enable them to occupy the land [b]. Hence, long after the inhabitants of the south were subdued, their northern enemies remained unbroken; and some of their fiercest conflicts were reserved for a period when they had expected nothing but easy and progressive triumphs. Their last trials even seemed to be the greatest; for the Anakims, who were of such gigantic stature, and whose strong holds were so impregnable, as to intimidate all the spies that Moses had sent forty years before to search out the land, maintained themselves to the last, and were never conquered till all the other powers had been rooted out [c]. With the exception of Gibeon, there was not so much as one city that sought peace with Joshua; all of them being given over to judicial blindness, that they might suffer the full punishment of their iniquities [d]. At last, however, came *the completion* of their warfare, when every enemy being subdued, they rested from all their perils and fatigues, and took possession of the whole land. Then they reaped the fruits of all their labours; they occupied all the cities, enjoyed all the spoils, and sat down in peace and safety, none making them afraid [e].]

And now contemplate the Christian's warfare—

[In its *commencement*, the power of God is not less displayed than in the history before us. The transition which a person experiences in conversion, is justly represented in the Scripture as a coming

[a] Josh. x. 5. & xi. 4. [b] Exod. xxiii. 29, 30. [c] ver. 21.
[d] ver. 19, 20. [e] ver. 13, 14.

coming "from darkness into marvellous light[f];" or rather, as "a passage from death to life[g]." What human power is sufficient for a change like this? St. Paul represents the power displayed in it as equal to that which was exhibited by Almighty God in raising his Son Jesus Christ from the dead, and in setting him at his own right hand in heaven, above all the principalities and powers, whether of heaven or hell[h]. The remembrance of this is an encouragement to the Christian in all his future conflicts. He know assuredly who it is that "hath begun the good work within him: he is constrained to say, "I have laboured, yet not I, but the grace of God that was within me; by the grace of God I am what I am[i]." In its *progress* the work is carried forward more apparently by his own exertions. He has the armour given him; but he is called forth to use it. His whole life is to be a state of warfare; and it is by fighting that he is to obtain the victory. He will not find any one enemy that will submit to him, till smitten by the sword of the Spirit, and constrained by the holy violence of faith and prayer. The world, the flesh, and the devil will combine their forces to destroy him. There will be some seasons of more than ordinary temptation, when he will need peculiar succour from on high: and there will be other seasons of comparative rest: but, if Satan at any time depart from him, it will only be for a season, as he departed from Christ himself[k]. As it is with the Church at large, which has times of persecution and times of peace[l], so is it, in a greater or less degree, with all the individuals that compose the Church: and not unfrequently has the Christian his sorest trials, either when he is most expecting peace[m], or when his last enemy, even death itself, is about to be swallowed up in everlasting victory[n]. At last the *completion* of his warfare will arrive: O blessed season, when every enemy shall be finally subdued! Then the almost invincible Anakims shall be rooted out; and Satan, that great adversary, by whom all the rest are concentrated and led on to battle, shall be bruised under his feet; and he shall enjoy the fruit of his victories in everlasting rest.]

The same resemblance as we have traced in reference to the conquest of Canaan, may yet further be discovered in,

II. The partition of it—

The land, when conquered, was divided to the tribes by lot; God having reserved to himself the whole disposal of it: his it was from the beginning; and

[f] 1 Pet. ii. 9. [g] 1 John iii. 14. [h] Eph. i. 18—22.
[i] 1 Cor. xv. 10. [k] Luke iv. 13. [l] Acts ix. 1, 31.
[m] Job i. 10. 2 Cor. xii. 2, 7. [n] 1 Cor. xv. 54.

and his it continued to be; and they must all receive it as a gift from him. Mark here *the order of events;*

1. The grant—

[God gave the land to Abraham, whom of his own sovereign will he had called out from an idolatrous people, and to whom for his own glory's sake he had revealed his will. To him, I say, God gave the land; not for any merit that was in him, either seen or foreseen, but "for the manifestation of his own glory." And whence is it that man is taken, in preference to the fallen angels? or whence are Christians selected from the whole world, which lieth under Pagan darkness or Mahometan delusion? or whence are some "recovered out of the snare of the devil, by whom they have been led captive at his will," whilst others are left still in bondage to him, wallowing in their lusts, and enemies of all righteousness? Will any man presume to say that he "made himself to differ[nn]," or that God chose him for his own superior goodness, either seen or foreseen[o]? Let not that man ever speak of pride; for wherein could Lucifer himself exceed such presumption as this? No: we must affirm with the Apostle, that "God hath chosen us in Christ before the foundation of the world; and *that*, not because we *were* holy, or because he foresaw we *would be* holy, but that we *might be* holy, and without blame before him in love[p]." He, of his own sovereign will, gave his Son to us, and us to him[q]; yea, he "predestinated us also unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the Beloved[r]."]

2. The acquisition—

[This, though a gift, was yet attained by means of their own exertions. The common objection against the doctrines of predestination and election is, that it encourages men to sit down supinely, expecting God to do every thing, whilst they themselves do nothing. But did Joshua and Caleb argue so; or was there found one single person in the whole kingdom of Israel that argued so? No; they all knew that the gift of Canaan did not supersede the necessity of their exertions, nor did the efforts they used, prevent it from being a gift. They knew that it was a gift; and that very consideration encouraged them to fight

[nn] 1 Cor. iv. 7.

[o] Deut. ix. 4—6. Even such a *thought* is reprobated; and how much more such an assertion!

[p] Eph. i. 4. [q] John xvii. 6, 9, 10.

[r] Eph. i. 5, 6. It is not expedient to be always harping upon this subject; but we must not be ashamed of it, or afraid on proper occasions to confess it.

fight for it; and they laboured cheerfully, because they "knew that their labour would not be in vain in the Lord." Thus then it must be with us. "The covenant whereby heaven is made over to us, is ordered in all things and sure:" yet we must "fight the good fight of faith" and "quit ourselves like men," if ever we would enjoy any one of its blessings. It is "to those who by patient continuance in well-doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, that eternal life will be given[s]:" nor is there one single hour on this side eternity when we are at liberty to put off our armour: we must "be faithful unto death, if ever we would obtain the crown of life." The will of God is made known to us: every assistance is offered for the performance of it: in obeying it we must find our present happiness, and insure that which is to come. This order of things is absolutely irreversible: "we have need of patience therefore, that, *after we have done the will of God*, we may receive the promise[t]."]

3. The enjoyment—

[This, though long delayed, they attained at last; and doubtless considered themselves as well repaid for all their labours. But what was their rest in comparison of that which God has reserved for us? Of ours David speaks, when he represents God as swearing that the impenitent and unbelieving shall never enter into it: and in the Epistle to the Hebrews, this declaration of David's is brought to prove, that there must be some other, and better, rest than ever was enjoyed in this world. The rest which Joshua promised and gave to Israel in the land of Canaan, was only a type and shadow of that which God has prepared for us: "If Joshua had given them rest," says the Apostle, "David would not afterward have spoken of another day. There remaineth *therefore* a rest to the people of God[u]." Now here the whole parallelism which we have illustrated, is marked by God himself. Their Captain has the very same name with ours, and was a most illustrious type of him: and the rest of Canaan which he gave them after all their conflicts, was a distinguished type of heaven; to the everlasting possession of which we shall be advanced, when, under the direction, and by the aid of Jesus, we have subdued our spiritual enemies. Then all difficulties, temptations, trials, conflicts will be for ever banished; and Rest in the bosom of our God will be our everlasting portion.]

Let us LEARN then from hence *the issue*,

1. Of the world's impieties—

[God beareth long with sinners; and because his judgments against

[s] Rom. ii. 7. [t] Heb. x. 36.

[u] Heb. iv. 7—9. In ver. 8. the name "Jesus" should be translated "Joshua." They are both the same word in the Greek.

against their evil works are not executed speedily, their hearts are the more fully, and more securely set in them to do evil. But "God is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness." He has fixed a period beyond which his forbearance shall be exercised no longer: and then the most secure shall be visited, and the most powerful brought down. "Though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not be unpunished." O that the secure and thoughtless would reflect on this, ere it be too late! Hostility to Jesus and his people, whatever men may imagine, can never terminate, but in the destruction of those who indulge it. Beware then, Brethren, of hardening yourselves against God: for "whoever hardened himself against him and prospered?" His hand will surely find out all his enemies; and every refuge of lies shall be swept away with the besom of destruction.]

2. Of the saint's conflicts—

[Victory may in some cases be long held in suspense: and the most courageous veteran may need peculiar comforts from above. But the weakest shall triumph in due time; and be made "more than conquerors through Him that loved them." We readily grant, that, as the Israelites had to contend with "nations that were greater and mightier than they," so it is with us: but the issue of our conflicts shall be like theirs also. It is said on different occasions, that "God delivered the enemies into their hands;" and from thence the victory became certain. The same promise has he made to us; and it shall be fulfilled to every one of us in its season. Let not any then give way to unnecessary alarms. Appearances may be awful and alarming: but our consolation is, that "greater is He that is in us, than he that is in the world:" and, if at any time we be tempted to say, "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me?" let us instantly reply with the holy Apostle, "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord!"]

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## CLXX.

### SLOTH AND LUKEWARMNESS REPROVED*.

Josh. xviii. 3. *And Joshua said unto the children of Israel, How long are ye slack to go to possess the land which the Lord God of your fathers hath given you?*

CONSISTENCY in religion is by no means an easy attainment. Certain duties may be performed with zeal, whilst others of a more difficult and self-denying nature are shamefully neglected. We admire

* For New Year's Day.

mire and applaud the conduct of "the whole congregation of Israel" in relation to the tabernacle, which with one consent they "set up for the Lord in Shiloh," as soon as ever "the land was subdued before them." This mark of respect and gratitude, of love and devotion, was due to God in the first place: but should we not have expected, that they would immediately go on to complete the work which God had assigned them, and which they had almost brought to a successful termination? Yet behold, there were no less than seven tribes out of the twelve, who had not yet received their inheritance, and who manifested a most criminal indifference respecting the possession of their appointed portion. This negligence Joshua reproves in the words which we have read: for the elucidation of which we shall shew,

I. The force of the reproof as applied to them—

God had given them the land, and had so far subdued the inhabitants before them, that little remained but to go and take possession of the whole country. But they delayed, and their neglect brought a just reproof upon them;

1. For their indolence—

[It is manifest that they gave way to an indolent and slothful spirit, which kept them from making the exertions necessary for the acquisition of their respective lots. Now this is an habit which we are all too apt to indulge, and which has a most injurious effect wherever it prevails. Solomon speaks of it as rendering a man averse to the most necessary duties, insomuch that "his way is always like an hedge of thorns" that makes his every motion difficult and painful[a]. Hence he is impoverished; "The soul of the sluggard desireth, and hath nothing[b]:" even the attainments he has made are rendered unprofitable to him through the influence of this corrupt principle: "he roasteth not that which he took in hunting[c]:" in fact, as Solomon further observes, "The desire of the slothful killeth him[d]." Now to yield to this principle at any time is very reprehensible; but under *their* circumstances, when God had done so much for them, and there remained so little for them to do, it was highly criminal.]

2. For

[a] Prov. xv. 19. [b] Prov. xiii. 4. [c] Prov. xii. 27. [d] Prov. xxi. 25.

2. For the undue satisfaction they took in their present comforts—

[Doubtless their present state formed a great contrast with that which they had experienced in the wilderness; for they enjoyed all the rich provisions which had been treasured up for the use of the former inhabitants. But, because they were at present possessed of such abundance, they were unmindful of that which was destined for their future and permanent support. Thus it frequently happens, that a present portion diverts men from the pursuit of an ulterior object, which would have more richly compensated their continued labours. Not that we mean to decry *moderation;* for, when it is seated in the *desires* without impeding our *actions*, we consider it as a distinguished virtue: but where a partial attainment of what is truly good, renders us indifferent to the fuller possession of that good, we regard that as an abuse of God's goodness to us, and a perversion of what he designed for our encouragement. In the Israelites it argued base ingratitude to God, and was a very shameful method of requiting all his kindness to them.]

3. For the light thoughts which they entertained of their promised inheritance—

[It is evident that they did not regard it in the exalted light in which God had represented it to them: they thought but little of it as an inheritance assigned to them by the Deity, and still less as a type and emblem of that glorious inheritance reserved for his people in a better world. In this respect they are followed by the whole race of mankind. God bestows innumerable blessings on us, to lead up our minds to Him who gave them, and to stimulate us to the pursuit of far higher blessings: but we view these mercies only as they conduce to our present comfort, and entirely overlook the intention of the donor: yea, we scarcely ever begin to think of spiritual benefits, till he has either withdrawn, or embittered to us, our carnal enjoyments. In Israel, this conduct was peculiarly criminal, because the possession of this land had been promised to Abraham so many hundred years before, and had constituted the chief encouragement to the whole nation to devote themselves unreservedly to the service of Jehovah.]

The reproof however must not be confined to them; we must acknowledge,

II. The justice of it as applied to ourselves—

God has given to us a better inheritance, even heaven itself: and much has he done for us, in order to bring us to the possession of it. We speak not now of those who are yet "in darkness and the

shadow of death," but of those who have been "brought out of darkness into marvellous light:" yes, to the greater part of them is this reproof pre-eminently due. Let it only be considered how "slack" the professors of religion almost universally are in the pursuit of heaven; how slack, I say,

1. In reading the Scriptures—

[The sacred volume contains, not only the will which makes over to us the grant of this inheritance, but the title-deeds themselves, yea, a map also of the whole estate, a description of every *thing* that is valuable in it, and clear directions for securing to ourselves the everlasting possession of it. Now I would ask, What would be our employment, if such a document were put into our hands in reference to an earthly inheritance; especially if we were called to make out our title to it, and our ultimate enjoyment of it depended on proofs to be adduced from the records themselves? Should we not diligently apply ourselves to those records without loss of time? Should we not call in professional aid, and use every possible effort to establish our right? Should we find ourselves at ease whilst the issue of our exertions was doubtful? or should we waste our time in unprofitable pursuits, and thereby endanger the ultimate loss of our property through the craft and subtlety of an envious adversary? We all know how we should feel and act on an occasion like that. But how do we act in reference to *the inspired volume?* (I speak not of those who entirely neglect the Bible; their conduct speaks loudly for itself: I speak of those who do occasionally read the Scriptures.) Do we search that blessed book with half the interest that we ought? Do we mark every thing in it that can assist us either in discovering our title to heaven, or in securing the attainment of it? Let us ask ourselves, whether we do not often find less interest in it than in a common newspaper? and, though for conscience sake we read a portion of it every day, we find it oftentimes only a dead letter, and a sealed book, from whence we derive no real benefit. Does not *this* then shew how justly the reproof of "slackness" may be applied to *us?*]

2. In prayer—

[Prayer is that which brings down aid from above, and tends, more than any thing else, to the furtherance of the work of God within us. But O! what a poor, cold, formal service is prayer in general, even among those who profess to be looking for the enjoyment of heaven! But, what if we were professing great anxiety to reach a destined port, and yet carried no more sail than was just necessary to keep the vessel's head towards it; and every storm threatened to drive us out of our course; and it was often doubtful whether the currents had not a more powerful influence

influence to counteract our design, than the wind to further it; would any one believe that we were in earnest? It is by prayer that we catch the heavenly gales, and are advanced towards the land which we pretend to seek: let conscience say then, whether we carry the canvas which we might; or whether our secret aspirations justify our outward professions. Who amongst us, in the view of these holy duties, does not even reproach himself, and almost doubt his own sincerity?]

3. In the mortification of sin—

[In this we particularly resemble the Israelites of old. Because the armies of Canaan were no longer formidable to them, they overlooked the scattered remains which still occupied many strong holds, and considered them as unworthy of their notice. And is it not thus with too many amongst ourselves? We are not any longer tempted to the commission of gross, open, scandalous iniquities; and therefore we rest satisfied with the victories we have gained, instead of prosecuting them to the utter extirpation of our indwelling corruptions. Look at many professors of religion: they will not be guilty of palpable dishonesty; yet will harbour covetous and worldly desires: they will not commit whoredom or adultery; yet will indulge much impurity in their imaginations. See the various parties in the Church: instead of exerting all their powers against their common enemy, they can waste their time in contending with each other: and even those who are united in the same Church too often weaken each other's hands by mutual disagreements, instead of edifying each other by fervent love. Do not these things shew, how lukewarm we are in the prosecution of our best interests? Were we in earnest, as we ought to be, we should account sin our only enemy; and the extirpation of it would be the one labour of our lives.]

4. In pressing forward for the prize of our high calling—

[This distinguished the great Apostle of the Gentiles; he "forgot the things which were behind, and reached forward for that which was before:" and, after his example, we should account nothing attained, as long as any thing remained to be attained: we should consider victories only as steps to future conquests; and think it time enough to rest, when every enemy, even death itself, has been put under our feet. Instead of dreading the dissolution of our earthly tabernacle, we should groan for it, desiring to be dissolved, that we may be with Christ; yea, we should be "looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of Christ," when our sanctification will be perfect, and our triumph complete. But, how far is this from being the experience of the generality of Christians! We seem to cleave to life,

as if a state of pain and conflict were preferable to that of rest and happiness. Alas! alas! we live far below our privileges: whereas, if we were as heartily engaged in the work of our salvation as God requires us to be, we should manifest in our very countenances the radiance of God's image, and bear about in our souls the felicity of heaven.]

That we may give more effect to this reproof, we will set before you,

III. The considerations which are proper to stir us up to diligence—

Consider,

1. How much time you have lost already—

[What attainments might we not have made, if, from the commencement of our warfare, we had made no truce with our enemies, but had followed up our advantages with becoming zeal! — — — Many may look back for years, and yet be scarcely able to point out one foot of ground that they have gained, beyond that which was ceded to them in their first conflicts. But we must not forget, that it is not he who begins well, but "he that endureth to the end, that shall be saved."]

2. How your difficulties are increased by delay—

[Forty years after this time, the tribe of Dan had yet to fight for their inheritance[e]; and it was four hundred years before the Jebusites were driven from Jerusalem[f]. Had all the tribes proceeded with united vigour to fulfil the divine command in its utmost extent, they would not so long have had to lament that their remaining enemies were as "scourges in their sides, and thorns in their eyes." And who does not find, that corruptions gather strength by indulgence, and that graces decay for want of exercise? "Look then to yourselves, that ye lose not the things that ye have wrought, but that ye receive a full reward[g]."]

3. How certain is your success, if ye advance in your work—

[The promise and oath of Jehovah are on your side. If there were any room for doubt respecting the ultimate success of your labours, there would be some little excuse for lukewarmness: but when victory is sure, methinks the most timid person in the universe should not fear the conflict, nor the weakest hesitate to put forth his strength. Go on then without fear; and "ye shall never fall, but so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ[h]."]

4. How

[e] Judg. xviii. 1. [f] 2 Sam. v. 6—8. [g] 2 John viii.
[h] 2 Pet. i. 10, 11.

4. How richly Heaven will compensate for all your labours—

[What was Canaan, in comparison of the Rest that is above? It is no uncommon thing for the ungodly to find fault with the Lord's people as too strict, and to dissuade them from the exercise of so much zeal in the cause of Christ: but what would they think, if, like Paul, they were caught up to the third heavens, and beheld for a single hour those blest abodes? Would they think us then too much in earnest? Would they not rather stand amazed at the lukewarmness of those, whom they now condemn as "righteous overmuch?" They themselves cannot but feel the full force of this appeal: much more must you who are engaged in the service of the Lord, be well convinced, that "it is good to be zealously affected always in a good cause." To you therefore we say, as the spies did to the neglectful Danites, "We have seen the land, and behold, it is very good: and are ye still? Be not slothful to go, and to enter to possess the land[1]."]

[1] Judg. xviii. 9.

## CLXXI.

### THE DISBANDING OF THE TROOPS OF ISRAEL.

Josh. xxii. 4, 5. *Now return ye, and get you unto your tents, and unto the land of your possession, which Moses the servant of the Lord gave you on the other side Jordan. But take diligent heed to do the commandment and the law, which Moses the servant of the Lord charged you, to love the Lord your God, and to walk in all his ways, and to keep his commandments, and to cleave unto him, and to serve him with all your heart, and with all your soul.*

THE duties of soldiers and of their Commanders are well illustrated in this passage. The soldier's chief excellence is a prompt, steady, persevering, uniform obedience to the commands of his superiors, without regarding any difficulties, any dangers, any sacrifices: and amongst the chief excellencies of a Commander is an attention to the spiritual and eternal interests of those who are under his authority. The Reubenites, Gadites, and Manassites, had received their portion on the other side of Jordan on the express condition, that a just proportion of their tribes should pass over Jordan to fight in

in concert with the other tribes, and not return unto their inheritance till the whole land should be subdued. This they had done; and now that they were about to be disbanded, Joshua acknowledges to their honour, that "they had kept all that Moses the servant of the Lord had commanded them, and had obeyed *his* voice also in all that *he* had commanded them." But whilst he commends them for their fidelity to *him*, he endeavours to impress upon their minds a sense of duty and allegiance to God; and enjoins them to "take diligent heed to serve the Lord their God with all their heart, and with all their soul."

From this parting exhortation we are led to remark,

I. That a progress in holiness is above all things to be desired—

[Had Joshua merely judged it proper to insert an admonition relative to their religious duties, one or two expressions would have sufficed: but from the multitude of expressions used in the text, we see of what unspeakable importance he considered religion to be to every child of man. He not only mentions the subject first in general terms, that "they should do the commandment and the law," but enters particularly into it: they must have, as *the principle* of their obedience, *the love of God*: the *extent* of it must be to *all* God's ways: and, as to *the manner* of it, they must cleave to him with an unalterable determination of *their wills*, and the most ardent exercise of *their affections* — — — This is holiness; but nothing short of it will suffice. We do not say that the Christian must be *perfect*: for where should we then find a Christian? but he must aim at perfection, and be continually pressing forwards for the attainment of it. This was the great object of Joshua's solicitude both for himself and his soldiers: this was the great end for which our Lord Jesus Christ died upon the cross, even "to purify to himself a peculiar people zealous of good works:" and this must be the one object for which we should desire to live.]

II. That, whatever progress any person may have made, he still needs to hear words of counsel and exhortation—

[The soldiers whom Joshua was disbanding had continued with unshaken fidelity to fulfil their engagements: and though they had been detained from their families and possessions for seven

seven years, they never once murmured or repined at the delay: yet Joshua did not on that account think that his religious counsels to them were superfluous. Nor should the most established Christian imagine himself to be beyond the reach of danger, or to have attained such eminence as not to need every possible help for his furtherance in the divine life. St. Peter, writing to those to whom "the divine power had already given all things that pertained to life and godliness," says, "I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth." And indeed the counsel in our text intimates, that, in order to do the commandments, we must "take heed," yea, "take *diligent* heed" to them; so many are our temptations to violate them, and so averse are we by nature to observe them — — — In a general way, the truth of these observations will be thought so obvious, as that they scarcely deserved a mention: but experience proves, that they need to be insisted on with all possible earnestness: for, whilst the professors of religion depart from open iniquity, there is in every one of them some besetting sin, which they are prone to cherish and indulge. Moreover, their blindness with respect to that sin is most astonishing: for, not only are they unconscious of its domination, but they are even ignorant of its existence in them; and not unfrequently do they give themselves credit for that *as a virtue*, which others see to be their *greatest defect*. How blind are men to their pride, their vanity, their worldliness! How often does an angry and bitter spirit habitually prevail in men, who never mourn over their unchristian tempers, or appear even to be aware of them! — — — We call upon all then to "be jealous over themselves with a godly jealousy;" and to hear the exhortations of the Gospel with an especial reference to themselves, searching out their own *spirit*, and striving to attain the full "*mind* that was in Christ Jesus."]

## III. That a state of peace and prosperity is a season of peculiar danger—

[Now the disbanded soldiers were returning to the bosom of their families, and the peaceful prosecution of their worldly business: and, as Moses had long since warned them, they were in danger, whilst enjoying "houses which they built not, wells which they digged not, and vineyards which they planted not; they were in danger, I say, of forgetting the Lord their God." And who does not feel how apt the mind is to yield to the pleasures of sense, and to relax its ardour in the pursuit of heavenly things, when it has no trials or troubles to stimulate its exertions? Visit the chambers of sickness, and of health; and see how different the same persons are under the two different states! View persons under painful bereavements, and see them afterwards

afterwards in the full enjoyment of all earthly comforts! Truly, if we regarded heavenly things only, we might rather congratulate men on troubles than on the absence of them, and account prosperity their greatest snare. To all then who are looking forward to any worldly acquisitions or comforts, or who are now living in the possession of them, we would urge with peculiar earnestness the necessity of vigilance, lest having "begun in the Spirit, they end in the flesh." Hear the exhortation of an inspired Apostle: "Follow holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord; *looking diligently*, lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up, trouble you, and thereby many be defiled[a];" there you may see the hidden nature, the growing tendency, the baneful effects of sin; its effects in the heart, the Church, the world — — — O that we may be ever on our guard against its secret workings; and most of all on our guard, when ease and prosperity are administering opiates to our souls!]

"Suffer ye then, Brethren, a word of EXHORTATION[b]"—

[When ye are released from your present warfare, and are dismissed to your eternal inheritance, ye will be beyond the reach of sin: in the bosom of your God your holiness and felicity will be complete. But, as long as you are in this world, you will need to have every word of Joshua's injunctions repeatedly enforced. See then to it that you "love the Lord your God," who has redeemed you from sin and Satan, death and hell — — — See that, from a sense of love to him, and his love to you, your obedience be carried to its utmost possible extent; and strive to "be perfect even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" — — — And, since it is certain that you will find many things to draw you away from him, mind that you "cleave to him with full purpose of heart," "abhorring that which is evil, and cleaving to that which is good" — — — Lastly, let all your affections centre in Him, and in his ways: let "your whole heart and your whole soul" be engaged in his service; and let the delight which you experience in fulfilling his will, be manifested, "not in word and in tongue, but in deed and in truth;" so that your bitterest enemy, or most watchful observer, may have no room to doubt either the excellence of your principles, or the reality of your attainments.]

[a] Heb. xii. 14, 15.

[b] Heb. xiii. 22.—If this were on the occasion of *disbanding troops*, the commendation given by Joshua, as well as his exhortation, should, as far as was applicable, be insisted on.

## CLXXII.

### THE ALTAR OF WITNESS.

Josh. xxii. 11, 12. *And the children of Israel heard say, Behold, the children of Reuben, and the children of Gad, and the half tribe of Manasseh, have built an altar over against the land of Canaan, in the borders of Jordan, at the passage of the children of Israel. And when the children of Israel heard of it, the whole congregation of the children of Israel gathered themselves together at Shiloh, to go up to war against them.*

RELIGION has often been made a plea for ambitious and bloody projects: but it never was on any occasion so truly and properly the ground of war, as in the event that is here recorded. The tribes who had their portion on the east of Jordan, after having been disbanded, came to the land of their possession: and, apprehending that at some future period they might be disowned by their brethren on account of their not having their inheritance in the land of Canaan, they built a large altar on the borders of their own land near Jordan, to serve as a memorial to all future ages, that they belonged to the tribes of Israel, and were the worshippers of Israel's God. The other tribes having no conception of an altar being erected but for sacrifice, regarded this as an act of rebellion against God, and determined instantly to go and punish the supposed apostates. But first they agreed to send an embassy, to see whether they could not prevail by milder methods to reclaim them from their wickedness. The ambassadors went; a convention met; an explanation took place; the misapprehensions were removed; and all was speedily and amicably settled.

Now this history will suggest many useful hints for the regulating of,

I. National interests—

[The question was, in fact, of infinite importance to the whole nation. Repeated occasions had arisen wherein the sin of individuals had been visited upon the whole nation. The iniquity of Achan had not long since caused the defeat of Israel's hosts, and the loss of six and thirty men: and, not very long before,

before, the connexion of many with the Midianitish women in whoredom and idolatry, brought destruction on 24,000 Israelites in one day. What then could be expected, but that, if these who had erected the altar should pass unpunished, God would punish all the other tribes as partners in their guilt? To avert so terrible an evil was *their* bounden duty; and therefore they acted right in determining to avenge the quarrel of their God. But, as it was possible they might prevail by gentler means, they sent delegates from every tribe, with Phinehas at their head, to expostulate with them on their conduct. These were met by other delegates from the supposed offenders, and every thing was cleared up to their satisfaction: and thus the controversy was terminated to the unspeakable joy of all parties.

Now in this we see how nations ought to act, whenever grounds of disagreement arise, and their mutual interests interfere. Their ambassadors should confer with each other in a conciliatory manner, anxious to prevent extremities, and, by mutual explanations and concessions, to adjust their differences. One thing in particular was worthy of applause in those who seemed disposed for war: they were intent only on the prevention of iniquity; and, imagining that the altar had been raised with a view to put the land of Gilead on a footing of equality with the land of Canaan, they offered to give up a proportionate share of their own land to those who had erected it, and thus to sacrifice their own interests for the preservation of peace. Alas! how different is this from what is usually found amongst contending nations! Modern embassies are most frequently characterized by duplicity and concealment, by chicanery and finesse, and by a wanton pertinacity about matters of inferior moment. Were all actuated by the spirit of Israel on this occasion, were frankness on the one side met by patience and conciliation on the other, the earth would be no more deluged with blood, but the "swords would be beaten into ploughshares," and happiness would reign, where nothing but desolation and misery is seen.]

But this history will be further useful for the regulation of,

II. Judicial policy—

[This act was in reality an enforcing of the existing laws under the direction of the Civil Magistrate: for, though Joshua is not mentioned, we can have no doubt but that Phinehas and the ten princes had received his sanction at least, if they did not proceed by his express command. The law of God had plainly enjoined, that there should be only one place for God's altar, and that all the tribes should offer their sacrifices *there*[a]. It also commanded, that, if any attempt should be made by any part of Israel

[a] Deut. xii. 5, 7.

Israel to establish idolatry among them, the remainder, after due inquiry, should cut them off with the sword[b]. This then was an interference of Magistrates in support of the laws: and it was indispensably necessary that they should interfere, to prevent so fatal a schism as was likely to arise.

We would not be understood to say, that Civil Magistrates would be justified in using the sword for the prevention or punishment of schism *now*. The true Church is not so accurately defined now, as that any one body has a right to assume to itself the exclusive privilege of being called The Church of Christ: nor is there any commission given to Magistrates to use carnal weapons in the support of any particular system, either of doctrines or of discipline, in the Church: but where, as in the instance before us, there appears to be a public renunciation of all religion, and a profane contempt of all laws, the Magistrate is bound to interfere; and every Christian in the land is bound to give him his support. *Opinions* are not within the cognizance of the Civil Magistrate, except when they are manifested in actions, or are so promulged as to endanger the peace and welfare of society: but, when carried to that extent, they justly come under his controul. This vigilance however, though sufficiently exercised in relation to the things which concern the State, is but little seen in the suppression of profaneness and iniquity. We have laws against every species of iniquity; but they are not carried into effect. The fear of divine judgments on the land scarcely ever enters into the bosoms either of Magistrates or people: hence, if only there be no flagrant violation of the peace, iniquity may prevail almost to any extent, without any one to vindicate the honour of God, or to avert his displeasure from a guilty land. In this respect there is an awful difference between the Israelites and us: insomuch that we, with all our superior advantages, are not worthy to be compared with them. Yet we must remember, that whenever we put forth the arm of power for the suppression of vice, our first object must be, by expostulation, to reclaim; nor must we ever inflict punishment, till milder measures have failed of success.]

This history will be yet further useful to us in the regulation of,

III. Religious zeal—

"It is good to be zealously affected always in a good thing:" but our zeal should particularly exert itself,

1. To prevent apostacy from God—

[This was the real object of the persons who raised the altar: they, in a most reverential and solemn manner, called God to witness

[b] Deut. xiii. 12—15.

witness that they had been actuated only by a desire to transmit to their posterity an indelible assurance, that they were as truly the Lord's people, as those who dwelt in Canaan; and that though their land was separated from that of their brethren, their interests and privileges were the same.

Here was a noble example of regard for posterity. It might have been better indeed to have consulted Joshua, or rather to have taken counsel of the Lord, respecting this measure, before they had carried it into execution: but holy zeal does not always pause to consider all possible effects and consequences; (though doubtless, the more tempered it is with wisdom, the more excellent it appears:) but God does not blame their conduct: and in this at least we shall do well to follow it, namely, by exerting ourselves in every possible way to transmit, and to perpetuate even to the remotest ages, the knowledge of God, as our God, our Father, and Redeemer.

The other tribes also manifested a noble zeal in the same cause, though by different means. They were fearful that this altar would be the means of turning many of their brethren from the worship of the true God; and they went forth at the peril of their lives to prevent it. It may be said, that these two were less temperate than they should have been: but, convinced as they were in their own judgment, their zeal was not at all more ardent than the occasion required. Though they spoke roughly, they spoke with candour, and with a perfect openness to conviction, if any thing could be said to justify the act. And their offer to surrender a part of their own possessions, in order to remove the temptation to which, in their own minds, they had ascribed the act, shewed, that they were actuated solely by a regard for God's honour and for Israel's good.

Here then is proper scope for all our zeal. We should remove, as far as possible, both from ourselves and from our children, every temptation to apostacy from God. We should rebuke sin in others also, and set ourselves against it to the uttermost. We should shew ourselves on all occasions on the Lord's side; and be willing to sacrifice, not only our property, but even life itself, in vindicating his honour, and maintaining his interest in the world.]

## 2. To preserve love and unity with man—

[If we find somewhat to blame in each of these opposite parties; in the one, an undue precipitation in building the altar; and, in the other, an undue hastiness in ascribing it to wrong intentions; we behold much, very much, to admire in both. When the accusers found themselves mistaken, they did not shift their ground, and condemn their brethren for imprudence; nor, when the accused had evinced their innocence, did they condemn their accusers on the ground of uncharitableness and injustice: the

the one were as glad to acquit as the others were to be acquitted; and both united in unfeigned thankfulness to God, that all ground of dissention was removed.

Now it will almost of necessity sometimes happen, that the well-meant actions of our brethren shall be misconstrued, through an ignorance of their precise views and intentions: it may also happen, that the well-meant reproofs of our brethren may be founded in misconception. Here then is ample room for the exercise of well-tempered zeal. To avoid, on the one hand, unnecessary accusations, and gladly to retract them if they have been unwittingly adduced; and, on the other side, to avoid vindictive recriminations, and with pious meekness to satisfy the minds of any whom we may have unintentionally grieved; *this* is the spirit which we should continually cultivate: it should be the labour of our lives to "keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace:"]

3. To avert the Divine judgments from our guilty land—

[It is a memorable expression which is recorded on this occasion; "Now ye have delivered the children of Israel out of the hand of the Lord[c]." Sin delivers us *into* his hand for punishment. Of this, the history of Israel in all ages is a decisive proof[d]. On the other hand, repentance delivers us *out of* his hand; as was remarkably exemplified in the case of Nineveh; which, but for the intervention of their penitence, would have been overthrown in forty days. But we need not go further than to the history before us, where this very effect is ascribed to the pious zeal of the Reubenites and Gadites. Happy would it be for us, if we all considered the effect of our conduct on the public welfare! God has no pleasure in punishing his creatures: and he is ever ready to remove his judgments, when they have produced in us the desired humiliation. Let us then approve ourselves to him: and then, though our zeal be misinterpreted, and even our own brethren be for a time incensed against us, our righteousness shall be made to appear, and our labours be crowned with the approbation of our God.]

[c] ver. 31.

[d] If this be the subject of a *Fast Sermon*, the judgments inflicted on us may be adduced as an additional proof.

## CLXXIII.

### GOD'S FAITHFULNESS TO HIS PROMISES.

Josh. xxiii. 14. *Behold, this day I am going the way of all the earth: and ye know in all your hearts and in all your souls, that not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the Lord your God spake concerning you: all are come to pass unto you; and not one thing hath failed thereof.*

IT has been common in all ages to pay peculiar attention to the words of dying men: and the more eminent their characters were, the more regard has been shewn to their last instructions or advice. The person speaking in the text, was, in some points of view, distinguished even above Moses himself: for though Moses was the appointed instrument of bringing the Israelites out of Egypt, he was forced to leave them to the care of Joshua, who alone was commissioned to settle them in Canaan; and who was therefore a more illustrious type of Jesus, whose name he bore[a], and whose character he prefigured. The dying words of such a person, when speaking too the dictates of inspiration, may well be considered as calling for more than ordinary attention; especially when the scope of them was to vindicate the honour of God, and they were delivered in a way of solemn appeal to the whole nation of the Jews. But they have yet a further claim to our regard, because, though primarily applicable to those to whom they were immediately addressed, they are equally applicable to the Lord's people, in every place, and every age.

To illustrate them in this view, we shall,

I. Notice some of those good things which the Lord our God has spoken concerning us—

In order to mark, what we are principally to insist upon, the faithfulness of God in performing his promises, we will specify some that were made,

1. To the Church at large—

[God

[a] The names *Joshua* and *Jesus* are the same in the Greek.

[God promised to the Church the gift of his dear Son[b] ——— the abiding presence of his Spirit[c] ——— and a final triumph over all her enemies[d] ———]

2. To individual members in particular—

[Though the names of individuals are not specified, their characters are delineated, and that too in such a way as that all who study the sacred oracles may read, as it were, their names in them. There are distinct promises made to the humble[e] ——— the weak[f] ——— the tempted[g] ——— the backslidden[h] ——— and especially to them that trust in God[i] ——— In that class is every rank and order of true Christians comprehended, "Verily it shall be well with the righteous[k]."

These are "great," "exceeding great and precious, promises[l];" and the persons who correspond with the different characters, are at full liberty to apply them to themselves.]

Having taken a short view of the promises, we may proceed to,

II. Shew the faithfulness of God in fulfilling them—

There is in the minds of all who have heard the Gospel, a general conviction of the truth and faithfulness of God—

[It is seen that God has already fulfilled all that he has promised in reference to the Church at large. Besides what he did for the Jews[11], he has sent his Son; he has poured out his Spirit; he has maintained his Church, notwithstanding all the efforts that have been used both by men and devils to destroy it. And from hence we feel a persuasion, that his word shall be fulfilled in other respects also. We do not indeed suffer our convictions to operate as they ought; yet we revolt at the idea that "God should lie[m]," and we know that "he can not deny himself[n]" ———]

All who have ever sought after God at all, have had proofs of his veracity in their own experience—

[The Israelites "knew in all their hearts, and in all their souls,"

[b] Gen. iii. 15. Gen. xxii. 18. Deut. xviii. 18. Isai. vii. 14. & ix. 6. & liii. 6. Dan. ix. 24. Jer. xxiii. 6.
[c] Prov. i. 23. Isai. xxxii. 15. Ezek. xxxvi. 25—27. John xv. 26. John xvi. 14. ib. ver. 8. Zech. xii. 10. Rom. v. 5. 2 Cor. i. 22.
[d] Isai. xxvii. 2. & xxxiii. 20. & liv. 17. Jer. xxxi. 35—37. Matt. xvi. 18.
[e] Isai. lxvi. 2. Jam. iv. 6. Isai. lvii. 15.
[f] Isai. xlii. 3, 4. & xl. 11. & xli. 14, 15, 17, 18. 2 Cor. xii. 9. Am. ix. 9.
[g] 1 Cor. x. 13. Heb. ii. 18.
[h] Jer. iii. 14, 22. Hos. xiv. 4.
[i] Isai. xxvi. 3. Ps. cxxv. 1. Jer. xvii. 7, 8.
[k] Isai. iii. 10.
[l] 2 Pet. i. 4.
[11] Josh. xxi. 43—45.
[m] Numb. xxiii. 19.
[n] 2 Tim. ii. 13.

souls," that God had fulfilled his promises to them. And are there any who have ever called upon him, or trusted in him, and not found him ready to hear their prayers, and to supply their wants? If we look back to seasons of peculiar trial, shall we not find some manifestations of his mercy, sufficient to shew, that, if we have not received more from him, it has been owing to our own backwardness to ask, rather than to any unwillingness in him to give?———]

Nor can the whole universe produce one single instance wherein his promises have failed—

[We can make the same appeal to you, as Joshua, after sixty years' experience, did to the Israelites. Bring forth every promise from the Bible; then search the annals of the world; and inquire of every creature in it, to find one single instance of God's violating or forgetting a promise: and if one instance can be *proved*, we will consent that his word shall henceforth be called in question. Tell us then, To whom has he "been a wilderness[o]?" What penitent, believing, and obedient soul hath he ever forsaken[p]? He himself bids you "testify against him[q]." But we defy the whole world to impeach his veracity, or to contradict our assertion, when we say, that "*all* which he hath promised us is come to pass; not one thing hath failed thereof"———God may have delayed the accomplishment of his promises, or fulfilled them in a way that was not expected: but not one of them has ever failed.]

ADDRESS,

1. Those who have not considered the faithfulness of God—

[In spite of the general conviction of God's truth that floats upon our minds, there is a proneness in us to indulge a thought, that his mercy will in some way or other interpose to prevent the execution of his threatenings. But the veracity of God is pledged as much for the accomplishment of his threatenings as of his promises: and of this he *labours in the most earnest manner* to persuade us[r]. How many, alas! are now experiencing in hell what they would not believe when they were on earth! Let us learn to "tremble at God's word." Let us remember, that though the antediluvian scoffers said, as others now do, "Where is the promise of his coming[s]?" he did come at last, though he bore with them a hundred and twenty years. And in like manner he will overwhelm us also at last with the deluge of his wrath, if we enter not into the ark before the door be shut against us———"We are going the way of all the earth," whether we be old or young, rich or poor: and as death finds us, so shall we remain for ever. Stay not then till death overtake you;

[o] Jer. ii. 31. [p] Heb. xiii. 5. Isai. xlix. 14, 15. & liv. 7—10.
[q] Mic. vi. 3. [r] Ezek. xxiv. 13, 14. [s] 2 Pet. iii. 3, 4.

you; but join yourselves to the Lord, and to his people. "Come with us, and we will do you good; for *the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel*[t]."]

2. Those who are tempted to doubt his faithfulness—

[Let not delays lead you to harbour unbelieving fears. God sent not his Son till four thousand years after he had announced his purpose to the world: nor did he bring Israel out of Egypt till the time fixed in his promises was just expired. If a few more hours had elapsed, his promise to Abraham had been broken: but God remembered the very day; and then inclined the rebellious Pharaoh to submit: yea, he disposed the Egyptians to "*thrust his people out*" from their land, on "*the self-same day*" that he had fixed 430 years before[u]. Tarry then the Lord's leisure. Take the promises of God as your support, and "claim them as your heritage for ever[x]." Be not hasty in concluding that God will not accomplish them[xx]; but take them with you to a throne of grace, and plead them as the saints of old were wont to do[y]: then you shall find them all to be "yea, and amen, in Christ[z]." "If things be marvellous in your eyes, do not imagine that they must therefore be so in the eyes of God[a];" for as "there is nothing too *hard* for him" *to do*, so there is nothing too *great*, or too *good*, for him to *give* to his believing people.]

3. Those who are relying on his faithfulness—

[It cannot but be a source of unspeakable comfort to observe, in how many passages the faithfulness of God is expressly pledged for the performance of his promises. Does he promise to forgive our sins[b], to deliver us from temptation[c], to further in us the great work of sanctification[d], and to preserve us to the end[e]? We are told in each, that he is "*faithful* to do it" for us. It is also delightful to reflect, that "his word is *tried*[f]." Solomon's testimony was precisely that which is given in the text[g]: and, the more we trust in God, the more evidence shall we have that "he keepeth covenant and mercy to a thousand generations[h]." But remember that his fidelity to you requires in you fidelity to him: it lays you under a tenfold obligation to "hold fast the profession of your faith without wavering[i]." See then that ye bear in mind the vows that are upon you, and that ye execute all that ye have undertaken in your baptismal covenant. Labour to be found "children that will not lie; so will He be" your faithful and almighty "Saviour[k]."]

[t] Numb. x. 29. [u] Exod. xii. 51. [x] Ps. cxix. 111.
[xx] 1 Sam. xvii. 1. Ezek. xxxvii. 11. [y] Gen. xxxii. 12.
[z] 2 Cor. i. 20. [a] Zech. viii. 6. [b] 1 John i. 9.
[c] 1 Cor. x. 13. [d] 1 Thess. v. 23, 24. [e] 2 Thess. iii. 3.
[f] 2 Sam. xxii. 31. [g] 1 Kin. viii. 56. [h] Deut. vii. 9.
[i] Heb. x. 23. [k] Isai. lxiii. 8.

## CLXXIV.

### JOSHUA'S COVENANT WITH ISRAEL TO SERVE THE LORD.

Josh. xxiv. 21—29. *And the people said unto Joshua, Nay, but we will serve the Lord. And Joshua said unto the people, Ye are witnesses against yourselves, that ye have chosen you the Lord, to serve him. And they said, We are witnesses. Now therefore put away, said he, the strange gods which are among you, and incline your heart unto the Lord God of Israel. And the people said unto Joshua, The Lord our God will we serve, and his voice will we obey. So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and set them a statute and an ordinance in Shechem. And Joshua wrote these words in the book of the law of God, and took a great stone, and set it up there under an oak that was by the sanctuary of the Lord. And Joshua said unto all the people, Behold, this stone shall be a witness unto us; for it hath heard all the words of the Lord which he spake unto us: it shall be therefore a witness unto you, lest ye deny your God.*

THE pious servants of God may be disabled through age and infirmities from continuing their personal exertions, but they never will relax their zeal in the service of their Divine Master; and what they want in effective labours, they will endeavour to supply by stimulating and confirming the zeal of others. Moses, at an advanced age, renewed with Israel in the land of Moab the covenant which he had forty years before made with them in Horeb[a]: and Joshua in like manner, now that he was "waxed old and stricken in age," and was speedily "going the way of all the earth," convened all the tribes of Israel to Shechem, for the purpose of engaging them once more to give themselves up to God in a perpetual covenant; that so the good effects of his influence might remain, when he should have ceased to move them by his authority and example.

We shall,

I. Consider the covenant which he made with them—

The

[a] Deut. xxix. 1.

The covenant itself was, that they should serve the Lord—

[Not contented with requiring this of them in general terms, he specified the manner in which they must serve the Lord. They must serve him *sincerely*. It was not sufficient for them to call themselves his people, and to observe his ordinances with hypocritical exactness: their hearts must be fixed upon him; their delight must be to do his will; they must have no secret reserves of unmortified corruption; but must serve the Lord "in sincerity and truth[b]."

They must also serve him *resolutely*. It might "seem evil to them to serve the Lord," yea, it might be accounted so by the whole nation; but they must be inflexible in their purpose, and determinately say with him, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord[c]."

They must also serve him *exclusively*. The admonition in ver. 19 is variously interpreted. Some think it was an objection in the mouth of an Adversary, to deter persons from the Lord's service: others think it was a strong statement of the difficulties attending the Lord's service, suggested by Joshua for the purpose of stirring up the Israelites to more fixedness of purpose, and greater energy in their exertions. But we apprehend that the whole context determines the passage to a very different meaning. There were still among them some idols, which, though they did not worship, they valued and were averse to part with: and Joshua saw, that, if these were retained, the people would in time relapse into idolatry: he warned them therefore of the impossibility of their serving God acceptably whilst they retained these; and assured them, that God would never forgive them, if they did not put away the things which were sure to prove to them an occasion of falling. The following warning in the 20th verse, and the exhortation in the 23d, shew most satisfactorily, that this is the true meaning of the passage we refer to. God must be served *alone*: his glory will he not give to another: he is a "*holy*" God, that will tolerate no secret lust; and a "jealous God, that will endure no rival in our hearts, or in our hands."]

Having stated to them the terms of the covenant, he calls them to ratify and confirm it—

[Covenants are usually signed by the parties themselves, and then attested by others, as witnesses. Thus on this occasion he calls the Israelites to confirm and ratify this covenant by their own express consent, which they give in terms no less plain than if they had annexed to the covenant their own name and seal. The manner in which they do this is peculiarly worthy of observation: they first express their utter abhorrence of the very idea of

[b] ver. 14. [c] ver. 15.

of departing from God[d]: and then, assigning their obligations to Jehovah as a reason for their determination, they declare their fixed purpose to serve him, and him only[f]. Upon Joshua's expressing the jealousy which he entertained respecting them on account of their backwardness to cast away their idols, they renew their declarations with increased energy[g]. Then, when reminded that they will be witnesses against themselves, if ever they should turn aside from God, they voluntarily engage to be witnesses, and thereby affix, as it were, to the covenant their signature and seal[g]: and lastly, on being required to give evidence of the sincerity of their professions, they renew their protestations with more strength and energy than ever[h].

Joshua now calls other witnesses. He wrote their words upon the very copy of the law which Moses had deposited in the ark, that *that* might remain an everlasting witness against them: and then he "took a large stone, and set it up there under an oak, that *that* also might be a witness against them," if ever they should depart from God: thus taking care, that, the covenant being fully attested, they might be convicted, and condemned, and be for ever without excuse before God and man, if they should ever forget and deny their God[i].]

The zeal which Joshua shewed on this occasion will be approved by all: we may hope therefore to perform an acceptable service to you, whilst, with an eye to that covenant, we

II. Propose the same to you—

The duty of serving the Lord our God will be denied by none; and least of all by those who know the obligations which they owe to him for redeeming them from death by the blood of his only-begotten Son — — — But we beg leave to retrace, with application to yourselves,

1. The engagements you have entered into—

[You are bound to serve the Lord your God, *sincerely*, *resolutely*, *exclusively*.

There must be no dissimulation in this matter: you must have "truth in your inward parts:" to "call him 'Lord, Lord,' will be of no use, if you do not the things which he says." His word must be the *rule*, his will the *reason*, his glory the *end* of your obedience — — —

You will find that many will account the service of God an "*evil*" thing; odious in itself, injurious to society, and contemptible in all who addict themselves to it. You will find also that

[d] ver. 16. [e] ver. 17, 18. [f] ver. 21. [g] ver. 22.
[h] ver. 23, 24. [i] ver. 26, 27.

that the great mass of nominal Christians are alienated from the life of God, as much as ever the Jews of old were. For the truth of this we appeal to the lives of all around us. Yet you must "not follow a multitude to do evil," or forbear to walk in the narrow path of life, even though the whole world should urge you to accompany them in the broad road that leadeth to destruction. Nay; you must not only be stedfast yourselves, but must exert all your influence to animate and encourage others: you must adopt the noble resolution of Joshua, "*As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.*"

You must be on your guard too against harbouring any "idol in your heart[k]." Sensuality, or covetousness, or any other unmortified lust, will provoke God to jealousy, as much as gods of wood and stone: and if any one sin be willingly retained, any one service wilfully neglected, or any sacrifice deliberately withheld, we must say with Joshua, "The Lord will not forgive your transgression and your sin:" "an eye, or a hand or foot, retained in opposition to his command, will cause the whole body, and soul too, to be cast into hell:" he only that will "lose his life for Christ's sake, shall find it unto life eternal" — — —]

2. The witnesses that will attest your violation of them—

[You must be "witnesses against yourselves:" your own consciences will testify, if, when you are convinced that it is your duty to serve the Lord, you continue to neglect him. Well are we assured that we have even now within your own bosoms a witness to the truth of all that we affirm — — —

But there will be other witnesses against you. The word that we speak, the same will testify against you in the last day: for it is written "in the book of God's remembrance," and reserved in the sanctuary to be brought forth as the evidence of God's righteousness and the ground of his procedure? I may add too, The very walls wherein we are assembled will testify against you: to use the strong language of our text, "they have heard all the words that have been spoken to you," the faithful declarations, the earnest intreaties, the rich encouragements: yes, "the stones out of the wall will cry out against you[l]," if you continue to violate your baptismal engagements, and indulge an indifference to all the subjects of your prayers. Times without number have you prayed, that you might "live a righteous, sober, and a godly life, to the glory of God's holy name;" and yet, many of you at least, have either never set yourselves in earnest so to live, or have carelessly declined from the ways of God, and forgotten the vows that are upon you. Finally, God himself also will be "a swift witness against you." Yes, "he searcheth

[k] Ezek. xiv. 3, 4. [l] Hab. ii. 11.

searcheth the heart, and trieth the reins, and will give to every man according to his works."]

APPLICATION—

["Choose ye now whom ye will serve." To unite God and Mammon is impossible: "if Baal be God, serve him: but if the Lord be God, then serve him"———]

## CLXXV.

### ADONI-BEZEK'S PUNISHMENT.

Judg. i. 6, 7. *But Adoni-bezek fled: and they pursued after him, and caught him, and cut off his thumbs and his great toes. And Adoni-bezek said, Threescore and ten kings, having their thumbs and great toes cut off, gathered their meat under my table: as I have done, so God hath requited me.*

THERE are times and seasons afforded us for the performance of our duty, which, if they be once lost, can never afterwards be recovered. It was thus with the Israelites in the invasion of Canaan: if they had followed up their successes with becoming zeal, their difficulties would have been comparatively light: but at no time did they advance with that ardour which they should have manifested in such a cause. Joshua had reproved them for their indolence[a], and quickened them in some degree; but still, after his death, and fifteen years after their first invasion of Canaan, no one of the tribes had complete possession of the lot assigned them. The Israelites had increased, and now wanted the whole of their inheritance: but the Canaanites had increased also, and, possessing still their strong holds, were able to cope with Israel in battle. Now therefore the different tribes found the bitter consequences of their past indifference; and, as it should seem, were afraid to resume a warfare with such potent enemies. However, after having consulted God, Judah, by divine direction, took the lead, and, in conjunction with the tribe of Simeon, renewed the conflict with the Canaanites. God gave them success, and delivered

[a] Josh. xviii. 3.

vered into their hand Adoni-bezek, one of the most powerful of the kings of Canaan. Him they treated with great severity: and their conduct towards him forms the subject of our present consideration. We shall consider

I. The particular dispensation here recorded—

The conduct of this king had been most cruel—

[What occasions he had had for waging war against seventy kings, we know not: ambition never wants a pretext for its bloody projects: but to insult over their misfortunes in such a manner as to maim their persons, and compel them, like dogs, to gather up scraps from under his table for their subsistence, argued a degree of cruelty, which one could scarcely have conceived to exist in a rational being. One might suppose it possible that some particular provocation might have caused him to offer such an indignity to a single individual; but when such conduct was pursued towards so many vanquished kings, it manifestly proceeded only from his barbarous and brutal disposition. But here we are constrained to acknowledge, how empty is human greatness; how uncertain the continuance of those honours in which men so vainly pride themselves; and how often it happens that pre-eminence in station leads only to a sad pre-eminence in distress and misery. Nor can we forbear to notice, what desolation and trouble one ambitious tyrant may produce in the earth.

Whilst we see the dispositions of this man exhibited in such awful colours, let us not suppose that we ourselves are altogether exempt from them. The truth is, that the dispositions themselves are common to every child of man, though they have not attained in all the same maturity, or brought forth in all such visible and deadly fruits. We cannot but have seen that children feel a pleasure in vexing and tyrannizing over those who are weaker than themselves; and, as we grow up in life, a fondness for manifesting superiority and exercising despotic sway increases: and, in proportion as our opportunities for displaying these hateful qualities are enlarged, our evil tendencies become augmented and confirmed. How conspicuous is this in the great men of the earth, who can spread desolation over whole provinces without remorse, and invade, as we have seen, even neutral and friendly kingdoms for no other end than to gratify their own insatiable ambition!]

But he in his turn was made to feel the judgments which he had so wantonly inflicted upon others—

[It-

[It was a law in Israel, that Magistrates should punish offenders in a way of just retribution[b]: and doubtless it was by the direction of God, the righteous Governor of the universe, that the Israelites on this occasion maimed the body of their captive king. To insult over him indeed, as he had insulted over others, would have been inconsistent with those gracious affections, which Israel, as the Lord's people, were bound to exercise. In that part therefore the sentence was relaxed: but, as far as the law required, they "meted to him the measure which he had meted out to others." This brought his sin to his remembrance, and compelled him to acknowledge the equity of Jehovah, who in his righteous providence had so requited him: "As I have done, so God hath requited me." And though a feeling mind cannot but regret that such a judgment should be executed on a fallen prince, yet in this case we are constrained to acquiesce in it, and even to feel a secret satisfaction, in seeing that the evils which he had so cruelly inflicted upon others were at last brought home to himself.]

Let us now turn our attention from the particular dispensation, to,

II. The insight which it gives us into God's moral government—

"God is still known by the judgments which he executeth"—

[God has not relinquished the government of the earth: he orders and overrules every thing now as much as ever; and in his former dispensations we behold a perfect exhibition of the government which he still administers. Still, as formerly, does he requite the wickedness of men; sometimes *on the offenders themselves*, as when he smote Uzziah with leprosy[c]; and sometimes *on others upon their account;* as when he slew seventy thousand of the people, to punish the sin which David committed in numbering his subjects[d]. Sometimes he inflicts the judgment *immediately*, as on Herod who was eaten up with worms[e]; and sometimes *after a long season*, as on the sons of Saul for their father's cruelty to the Gibeonites many years before[f]. Sometimes his judgments are sent *as a prelude to those heavier judgments that shall be inflicted in the eternal world*, as in the case of Corah, Dathan, and Abiram[g]; and sometimes *after the offenders themselves have been forgiven*, as was experienced by David in his family[h], and by Manasseh, whose iniquities were visited upon Israel after he himself had been received up to glory[i]. Sometimes

[b] Lev. xxiv. 19, 20. [c] 2 Chron. xxvi. 19. [d] 2 Sam. xxiv. 15, 17.
[e] Acts xii. 23. [f] 2 Sam. xxi. 1, 6, 9. [g] Numb. xv. 24—33.
[h] 2 Sam. xii. 13, 14. [i] 2 Kin. xxiv. 2—4.

Sometimes his chastisements had *no particular affinity with the offence committed*, as in the plagues of Egypt; and sometimes *the offence was clearly marked in the punishment*; as in the case of Joram, who had slain all his brothers, and whose children were all, with one exception, consigned to the slaughter[k]; and as David, whose wives and concubines were openly defiled by his own son Absalom, just as he himself had defiled the wife of his faithful servant Uriah[l]. So minutely is this correspondence marked in the Scriptures, that even *the time* and *the place* are noticed, as designed to manifest the very offence which God designed to punish; as Israel's wandering in the wilderness *forty years* on account of their murmuring at the reports which were brought them by the spies who had searched out the land *forty days*[m]; and as Ahab's blood was licked up by dogs, on the very spot where dogs had licked the blood of Naboth, whom he had murdered[n].

We might further notice the correspondence between the *spiritual* judgments which God oftentimes inflicts for spiritual transgressions. Those who "will not hearken to *his voice*, he gives up to *their own counsels*[o];" those who *abandon themselves to all manner of wickedness*, he gives up to *vile affections and a reprobate mind*[p]; and those who "will *not receive his truth in order to salvation*," he gives up to *their own delusions, that they may be damned*[q]."

We have not Prophets indeed at this time to declare the particular instances in which God intends this righteous procedure of his to be discovered: but we have no reason to think that he has altered his system of government, and consequently no reason to doubt but that he still displays his own righteousness in his dispensations, as he has done in every age and quarter of the world. If any imagine that this conduct of his was confined to the nation whose temporal Governor he was, we must remind them that he dealt precisely in the same way with the heathen nations[r], and has taught us to expect that he will do so to the end of time[s].]

Whereinsoever he fails to requite, either good or evil, in this life, he will requite it perfectly in the world to come—

[God inflicts some judgments here on account of sin, in order that it may be seen that he *governs* the world; but he does not do it in all instances, in order that men may know, that he *will judge* the world. It often happens that the wicked prosper, and the righteous are oppressed; and yet God does not remarkably

[k] 2 Chron. xxi. 4, 17.
[l] 2 Sam. xii. 10—12. & xvi. 21, 22.
[m] Numb. xiv. 33, 34.
[n] 1 Kin. xxi. 19. & xxii. 38.
[o] Ps. lxxxi. 11, 12.
[p] Rom. i. 26—28.
[q] 2 Thess. ii. 10—12.
[r] Isai. xxxiii. 1.
[s] Rev. xviii. 5, 6.

remarkably interpose to punish the one, or to reward the other; but in the last day, all will be made right; and every creature in the universe, the good and the evil, the oppressor and the oppressed, will "receive at God's hands a just recompence of reward[t]."]

From hence we may LEARN,

1. To investigate the reasons of God's dealings with us—

[Every dispensation of Providence has a voice, to which we should give diligent attention. If we more carefully inquired into the design of God in his various dispensations towards us, we should find them an inexhaustible source of most instructive information. We might read in our afflictions some fault which God designs to correct; some mistake which he intends to rectify; some corruption which he desires to subdue; some grace which he is anxious to confirm; or some temptation, against which he purposes to fortify and arm us. As in the instance before us, God brought to the remembrance of Adoni-bezek the sins which he had committed, and which perhaps in the fulness of his prosperity he had overlooked; so he often, by a particular chastisement, shews us the evil of some practice which we had justified, or revives in our minds the recollection of some which we had too slightly condemned. I would say unto you therefore, "Hear the rod, and Him that hath appointed it." If you see not the reason of it, go unto your God, and say, "Shew me wherefore thou contendest with me?" and let no cross be suffered to escape from you, without having first paid to you that tribute of good, which by the order of Providence you are entitled to exact.]

2. To repent of particular sins—

[We cannot be too particular in calling to mind the sins which at any time we may have committed. Though we have not walked in the steps of this wicked tyrant, it is highly probable that we have lived in sinful habits, which custom has rendered familiar to our minds; and that we have in many things offended God, whilst we have not been conscious of committing any offence at all. Possibly Adoni-bezek at first felt a consciousness of doing wrong; but after a season, accounted his rival kings a legitimate prey, whom he might subdue, and torture in any way that he pleased. But at last God made him sensible of the enormity of his conduct. In like manner we may learn hereafter to view many parts of our conduct with far different eyes than we have yet done. God has borne with us indeed; but we must not consider his long-suffering as any proof of his approbation: he is recording every thing in the book of his remembrance, and will call us into judgment for it, whether it be good

[t] 2 Thess. i. 6—10.

good or evil. Let us then search and try our ways: let us pray that he will not "remember against us the sins and transgressions of our youth:" let us, like Hezekiah, "humble ourselves for the pride" or any other evil passion that has at any time been in "our heart." In this way we shall avert many evils from ourselves which unlamented sin would bring upon us, and extract the sting from those which God in his providence may allot us.]

3. To abound in every good work—

["The godly, no less than the sinner, shall be recompensed in the earth[u]:" "for godliness is profitable unto all things, having the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come." Look into the Scriptures, and you will find that there is nothing that you can do for God or for your fellow-creatures, to which God has not annexed an appropriate reward. "Draw nigh to him, and he will draw nigh to you:" "honour him, and he will honour you:" "serve him, and he will gird himself and serve you." Visit and relieve your sick neighbour, and "God will be with you in trouble, and make all your bed in sickness[x]:" "nor shall even a cup of cold water given to a disciple, in any wise lose its reward." Would you then have testimonies of God's approbation here? endeavour to "abound in the work of the Lord:" and expect also, that, in proportion as you improve your talents now, shall be the weight of glory assigned to you in a better world.]

[u] Prov. xi. 31. & xiii. 21. [x] Ps. xli. 1, 3.

## CLXXVI.

### THE DANGER OF INDECISION.

Judg. ii. 1—5. *And an Angel of the Lord came up from Gilgal to Bochim, and said, I made you to go up out of Egypt, and have brought you unto the land which I sware unto your fathers; and I said, I will never break my covenant with you. And ye shall make no league with the inhabitants of this land; ye shall throw down their altars: but ye have not obeyed my voice: Why have ye done this? Wherefore I also said, I will not drive them out from before you; but they shall be as thorns in your sides, and their gods shall be a snare unto you. And it came to pass, when the Angel of the Lord spake these words unto all the children of Israel, that the people lifted up their voice and wept. And they called the name of that place Bochim: and they sacrificed there unto the Lord.*

WE admire the condescension of Jehovah towards his chosen people, in that he raised up prophets to instruct

instruct them, and not unfrequently sent angels also to minister unto them. But the person who is here called "an Angel of the Lord," seems to have been no other than "the Angel of the Covenant," the Lord himself. It is certain that Jehovah did sometimes assume the appearance of an angel; as when he visited Abraham, and informed him of the judgments that were about to be inflicted on Sodom and Gomorrah. And it is clear that the person spoken of in our text was no created angel; for if he had, how could he with any propriety use such language? It was not a creature that brought the Israelites out of Egypt; but Jehovah. It was not a creature that made a covenant with them; but Jehovah. It was not a creature to whom they were accountable for their disobedience, or whose threatened dereliction they had such reason to deplore, but Jehovah: and the circumstance of his being said to come up from Gilgal, which is supposed to militate against this interpretation, rather confirms it: for it was in Gilgal, near to Jericho, that this same divine person had appeared to Joshua, as an armed warrior. That *he* was Jehovah, cannot be doubted; because he suffered Joshua to worship him; and even commanded him to put off his shoe from his foot, because the very ground whereon he stood was, by reason of *his* presence, rendered holy. In his conversation with Joshua he had called hiself "the Captain of the Lord's host;" and therefore there was a particular propriety in his appearing now to the people, to inquire, Why they had not carried his orders into effect? and to threaten that he would fight for them no longer. Besides, at Gilgal the people had revived the ordinance of circumcision, and had kept a passover unto the Lord; in both which ordinances they had consecrated themselves to God afresh, and engaged to serve him, as his redeemed people. In coming therefore as from Gilgal, the Angel reminded them of their solemn engagements, and humbled them the more for their violation of them.

The particular address of the Lord to them, together

ther with the effect it produced upon them, leads us to consider,

I. The danger of indecision—

The command which God had given to the Israelites was plain and express: they were "utterly to destroy the Canaanites, and to make no covenant with them[a]:" and on their performance of this condition was suspended the continuance of God's interposition in their favour. But they were not careful to execute the divine command: and therefore God threatened, that the Canaanites, whom they had presumed to spare, should become a lasting source of pain to them; that they would gradually draw them into sin, and ultimately become instruments of inflicting on them the vengeance they had merited.

Such is the sin which God's professing people still commit—

[The command to every one of us is to make no league with any one of our spiritual enemies; not with *the world:* on the contrary, we are to "overcome it;" to "come out from the people of it, and be separate;" to be "dead to" all its cares and pleasures, "being crucified to it, and esteeming it as crucified unto us:" we are "not to be of it, any more than Jesus Christ himself was of it." With respect to *the flesh* also and our corrupt nature, no truce must be made with it, even for a moment: we must "mortify our members upon earth," and "crucify the flesh with the affections and lusts:" we must not spare one evil desire, though it should be dear as "a right eye," or useful as "a right hand;" we must "pluck it out with abhorrence, or cut it off, and cast it from us." It is not sufficient to make them pay tribute: we must slay them; we must "shew them no mercy[b];" our hatred of them must be irreconcileable and incessant.

But what is our state? Do we find in ourselves this zeal? Instead of proceeding to the utter extirpation of our spiritual enemies, are we not satisfied if they do not reign? Are we not contented to let them exist, provided they keep themselves concealed from public view? ——— What then is the declaration of God unto us? Does he not warn us, that the evils which we spare shall become "as thorns in our sides, and prove a snare unto our souls?" And do we not find that it is even so in our daily experience? Let *the person who still associates with the men of this world,* say, whether he does not find that they are a clog to him

[a] Deut. vii. 2. [b] ib.

him in his spiritual course? whether his endeavours to please them do not lead him sometimes into sinful compliances, and his fear of displeasing them do not keep him from testifying against their evil ways? Will any say that he has found it practicable for "light to have communion with darkness, or Christ with Belial;" or that the soul can flourish whilst it is engaged in such a foolish attempt as that of reconciling the services of God and Mammon? Let *the person who is still too deeply immersed in the cares or pleasures of the world*, say, whether he has not often been led to strain his conscience in order to prosecute his ends, and to adopt some practices which in his heart he disapproves? ——— Let *the person who harbours some besetting sin*, ask, whether it has not often risen up with a force that was almost irresistible, and nearly, if not altogether, involved him in some flagrant transgression? Let the person in whom pride, or lewdness, or covetousness, or passion is suffered to dwell, answer this question ——— He knows but little of his own heart, who does not know, that sin is a flame, which, if not extinguished, may speedily "set on fire his whole nature[c]," and "burn to the lowest hell." Lastly, Let *the person who listens to the temptations of Satan*, say, whether there be any way of making him flee, but by perpetual resistance[d]? ———]

If such then be the danger of indecision, let us consider,

II. The duty of those who are convicted of it—

Two things were produced by the declarations of the Angel in the breasts of all the congregation of Israel; which also our own experience calls for; namely,

1. An humiliation of soul before God—

[The people "lifted up their voice and wept." And who amongst us has not abundant reason to follow their example? Whether we consider our *sin* or our *punishment*, we have but too much reason to weep. Indecision is not so light a sin as some imagine[e]: it shews an insincerity of heart, which is most odious in itself, and most offensive to God. See in what a light the Israelites beheld it, when once a conviction of it was brought home to their minds! and is not the sparing of inveterate lusts as wicked as sparing the devoted Canaanites? Does it not betray an equal want of reverence for God, of love to his name, and of zeal for his honour? Behold then what is the duty of every one amongst us: "Be afflicted, and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning, and your joy into heaviness; humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, and he shall

[c] Jam. iii. 6. with Deut. xxxii. 22. [d] Jam. iv. 7. [e] Job xxxi. 25, 28.

shall lift you up[f]." Nor does the threatened punishment afford us less occasion to weep: for a subjection to sin is the greatest evil that can befall us. If God should once say, "He is joined to idols; let him alone;" it would be a heavier judgment to us than immediate death and immediate damnation; because we should live only to "treasure up wrath against the day of wrath," and should perish at last under an accumulated weight of misery to all eternity. O that the dread of such a punishment might humble us all in dust and ashes!]

2. An application to God through the medium of sacrifice—

["They sacrificed there unto the Lord;" and had recourse to the blood of sprinkling for the remission of their sin. Though their weeping was very general, and very bitter, insomuch that the name of the place, which was *Shiloh*, was called *Bochim*, or *Weepers*, from that circumstance, yet did they not hope to pacify their offended God with tears: they knew that an atonement was necessary; and they sought him therefore in his appointed way. O that *we* might learn from them! Humiliation is *necessary*; but it is not *sufficient*: tears, even if we could shed rivers of them, could never wash away sin: the blood of atonement is necessary; "without shedding of blood there is no remission." We must apply to the Lord Jesus Christ, and "go to God through him." We must acknowledge our obligation to his sacrifice for all the mercy and forbearance we have already experienced; and must look to it as the only means of our reconciliation with God: it is his blood, and "his blood alone, that can ever cleanse us from our sin" ——— And here I would particularly remind you that the sin laid to the charge of Israel, was not of *commission*, but of *omission*; not some flagrant enormity, but a lukewarmness and neglect of duty: yet did they see the need of a sacrifice to atone for *that*. In like manner, though we should have no guilt imputed to us but that of omission and defect, yet must we apply to the blood of sprinkling, and seek for pardon through that one sacrifice which was once offered for us on the cross.]

LEARN then from hence,

1. The value of a faithful monitor—

[We do not like faithful admonitions, even from those whose special duty it is to reprove sin. We are ready to account them harsh and severe. But what is the office which a friendly monitor performs? Is it not that which the Angel of the Covenant himself executed, yea, and came from heaven on purpose to perform? But it may be said, that we alarm men, and make them melancholy: true; we shew them their guilt and danger, and

[f] Jam. iv. 9.

and try to bring them to a state of humiliation on account of it, and to an affiance in the Lord Jesus Christ for the pardon of it. But is this an evil? If the whole congregation were affected precisely as the whole Congregation of Israel were, every one *weeping* for his sins, and seeking the remission of them through the great sacrifice, would it be a matter for regret? No: we would to God that this very place might this day deserve the name of *Bochim;* and that the remembrance of it might never be obliterated from your minds! Sure we are that the Congregation of Israel felt themselves deeply indebted to Him who thus sought their welfare; and we have no doubt but that, however an ungodly world may hate our reproofs, there is not a contrite sinner in the universe who will not regard his monitor as a father, and "receive him as an Angel of God, even as Christ Jesus[g]." They will not hesitate to thank him, who, by bringing them to weep *here*, has kept them from weeping and wailing and gnashing their teeth in hell *for ever*.]

2. The danger of forgetting the admonitions that have been given us—

[During the days of Joshua and the Elders that outlived Joshua, the Israelites maintained some measure of stedfastness in their duty to God: but afterwards they fearfully declined, and brought upon themselves the most afflictive judgments. The whole remainder of the chapter from whence our text is taken, elucidates this truth. The impressions which were now made upon them gradually wore away; and the people relapsed into their former state of supineness. Of the unreasonableness of their conduct they were fully convinced: for, when the Angel asked them, "Why have ye done this?" they could not offer one word in extenuation of their guilt: but when they ceased to listen to the voice of conscience, they proceeded from one wickedness to another, "till there was no remedy[h]." And how often is this seen amongst ourselves! Many are deeply affected on some particular occasion: they will weep, and pray, and think of the Saviour; but in process of time they lose all their good impressions, and "go back with the dog to his vomit, and the sow that was washed to the wallowing in the mire." The Lord grant that it may not prove thus with *us!* May our "goodness not be as the dew, or as the morning cloud that passeth away;" but rather as the sun, which shines brighter and brighter unto the perfect day.]

[g] Gal. iv. 14. [h] 2 Chron. xxxvi. 15—17.

## CLXXVII.

### EHUD AND EGLON.

Judg. iii. 20. *And Ehud said, I have a message from God unto thee. And he arose out of his seat.*

GOD frequently is pleased to make use of his enemies for the correction of his own people: but when he has accomplished by them the purposes of his grace, he then calls them also into judgment for the acts which they have performed. In executing his will they have no respect to him, but follow only the wicked inclinations of their own hearts; and therefore he recompenses them, not as obedient servants, but according to the real quality of their actions. Thus he dealt with Sennacherib, who was only gratifying his own ambition, whilst, as a sword in Jehovah's hand, he was inflicting punishment on Israel; and thus he dealt with Eglon also, whom he had raised up to power for the purpose of chastising his offending people. Yet there is something very remarkable in the way in which God requited the wickedness of Eglon, and in which he delivered his people out of his hand. The man whom God raised up as his instrument, was Ehud; who, by a stratagem, effected the death of Eglon.

We will briefly set before you,

I. The conduct of Ehud—

Eglon, king of Moab, having subdued Israel, himself resided in Canaan, in the city of Palm-trees: and Ehud was sent, as the representative of Israel, to offer to him their accustomed tribute. But Ehud, hoping for an opportunity to assassinate Eglon, took a dagger with him: and, after having presented the tribute and left the city with his attendants, went back alone to Eglon, pretending to have a secret errand to him. Eglon ordered all other persons to depart from his presence, and thus gave Ehud a good opportunity of accomplishing his design. Ehud availed himself of it with great success: being left-handed, he drew forth the dagger without any suspicion, and plunged

it, even the haft together with the blade, into the belly of Eglon, who instantly fell down dead. Ehud then retired from the secret chamber where the transaction had taken place, and locked the doors after him, and went composedly away, as though nothing particular had happened; and thus effected his escape; and instantly stirred up Israel to cast off the yoke of Moab, before their enemies should have had time to concert their measures under another head.

Now to form a correct estimate of this action, we must consider it in two different points of view;

1. As voluntarily undertaken—

[In this view it was altogether indefensible. Treachery and murder can never be justified. Though Eglon was an usurper and a cruel oppressor, still the Israelites professed subjection to him; and Ehud went as their messenger, to present to Eglon their acknowledgments of that subjection. If he had chosen to cast off the yoke of Moab, he was at liberty to do so in a way of open warfare: but to become an assassin he had no right: nor could the end which he proposed, sanctify the means he used: the means were wrong; and he had "no right to do evil that good might come."]

2. As divinely commissioned—

[No created power could have authorized Abraham to slay his son, or Israel to plunder Egypt, and extirpate the inhabitants of Canaan: nor could any human being have executed such things of his own mind, without contracting very heinous guilt. But God is not bound by the rules which he has imposed on us: he may act towards his creatures as he sees best; and may employ instruments in any way that he pleases: nor would even an angel contract defilement in executing any commission that God had given him. An Angel slew in one night all the first-born in the land of Egypt; and on another occasion, 185,000 Assyrians: yet no one thinks of imputing guilt to him on that account:—so Ehud, if appointed to the work by God, might innocently effect it in the way he did. Jehu was commissioned by God to dethrone Ahab, and destroy his family: and, though he was punished afterwards because he was not actuated by a becoming zeal for the glory of God, yet for the action itself he was rewarded even to the fourth generation. Precisely thus may Ehud at this moment be receiving a reward from God for that act of his, which, under other circumstances, would have been highly sinful. And there is reason to believe that he was directed by God in that action; since not only were his wisdom, courage, and success beyond

beyond all that could have been expected in a merely human enterprise, but we are expressly told that "God raised up this man to be the deliverer of his people[a]."

We must not however imagine, that his conduct is to be followed as a precedent: for no man can dare to follow it, unless he have infallible evidence that he is called of God to do so: but, as no man can expect such a call at this time, no man can without the deepest criminality presume to imitate his example.]

Having thrown what light we can on the dubious conduct of Ehud, we proceed to suggest,

II. Some reflections arising from it—

Supposing Ehud to have been divinely commissioned, he might well say to Eglon, "I have a message from God to thee." At all events his language leads us to observe,

1. That God does send messages to mortal men—

[The whole creation is delivering to us, as it were, a message from God, and conveying to us the knowledge of his perfections[b]——— Every providential dispensation also has some important lesson to communicate: the mercies of God declare his goodness to us, and invite us to repentance[c], and his judgments are intended to discover to us some truths which we did not previously discern: "Hear ye the rod," saith the Prophet, "and Him that hath appointed it[d]." But it is in his word more especially that God comes down to commune with sinful man. His Gospel is so called from the very circumstance of its being a message of mercy, or, as the word means, good tidings from God to man: and Ministers are ambassadors from him, sent to beseech you in his name to accept reconciliation with him through the death of his Son. Indeed this message contains the substance of all that we have to speak to you in God's name; and from hence it is called by God himself, "the ministry of reconciliation." Behold then this day we come unto you and say, "We have a message from God to you!" He sends us this day to invite you to come to him for all the blessings of salvation, and to receive them freely at his hands, "without money, and without price[e]"———]

2. That, by whomsoever his messages are delivered, we should attend to them with the profoundest reverence—

[Though Eglon was a king, and Ehud an oppressed servant, yea, though Eglon was a heathen that did not worship the true God,

[a] ver. 15. [b] Rom. i. 20. Ps. xix. 1—4. [c] Rom. ii. 4.
[d] Mic. vi. 9. [e] Isai. lv. 1—3.

God, yet, the very instant that Ehud announced that he had a message from God unto him, he rose up from his seat, that he might receive it with the greater reverence. And does not this idolatrous heathen reproach us, who, when God's servants are delivering messages to us in his name, scarcely pay any attention to them, or perhaps fall asleep in the midst of them? Behold how Israel listened to the reading of God's word in the days of Nehemiah[f] — — —: that is the way in which we should read or hear the word of God at this time. We should not come to the house of God as critics, to sit in judgment; or as curious persons, to be entertained; but as sinners, to "hear what the Lord God will say concerning us." Beautiful is the example of Cornelius and his family[g]: they did not regard Peter as a man, but as a messenger from God: and in like manner should we also "receive the word, not as the word of man, but, as it is in truth, the word of God[h]." O that the spirit of Samuel were more visible in us[i], and that we sought instruction from the word, only in order to obey it[k]!]

3. That we should ever be prepared for whatsoever message he may send—

[Who can tell but that as his message to Eglon was a message of death, so he may send to us this day, saying, "Set thine house in order; for thou shalt die and not live." He needs not the aid of an assassin to take away our lives: there are millions of ways in which death may seize upon us. As for our security, the more secure we are in our own apprehension, the more likely are we to receive such a message from God[l]. It was when the rich fool was looking forward to years of enjoyment, that God sent to him, "This night is thy soul required of thee:" and it was when Job fondly expected he should "die in his nest[m]," that God pulled down his nest, and despoiled him of all that he had. Let us not then promise ourselves an hour's continuance even of life itself[n]: but be standing "with our loins girt, and our lamps trimmed, that at whatever hour our Lord may come, he may find us watching" — — —]

APPLICATION—***

*** This may be more appropriate or more general: in the former case, a message may be delivered as from God himself to *Oppressors*, and *the Oppressed*; (to awe the one, as Isai. x. 5—18. and encourage the other, as ib. ver. 24—27.) in the latter case, an Address may be made to *the Careless*, *the Backsliding*, and *the Faithful*, with the prefatory Remark to each, "I have a message from God to *thee*."

[f] Neh. viii. 3, 5, 6. [g] Acts x. 33. [h] 1 Thess. ii. 13.
[i] 1 Sam. iii. 10. [k] John ix. 36. [l] 1 Thess. v. 3.
[m] Job xxix. 18. See also Ps. xxx. 6, 7. [n] Prov. xxvii. 1.

## CLXXVIII.

### JAEL AND SISERA.

Judg. v. 24—27. *Blessed above women shall Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite be; blessed shall she be above women in the tent. He asked water, and she gave him milk; she brought forth butter in a lordly dish. She put her hand to the nail, and her right hand to the workman's hammer: and with the hammer she smote Sisera; she smote off his head, when she had pierced and stricken through his temples. At her feet he bowed, he fell, he lay down: at her feet he bowed, he fell; where he bowed, there he fell down dead.*

THE subject of assassination, one would suppose, should not admit of much diversity of sentiment: but there are those even in the Christian world, who think that in extreme cases, where the death of a tyrant would put an end to grievous oppressions and desolating wars, the dagger of an assassin might be employed. I am not aware that any would attempt to vindicate this sentiment by an appeal to Scripture: they would justify it rather on reasonings from expediency: but it is certain that, though in most cases where such actions are recorded they are mentioned with abhorrence, there are some instances wherein they are mentioned with approbation and applause. Such was the case of Ehud, who stabbed Eglon king of Moab: and such was the case before us, where Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, destroyed Sisera, whom she had received under her protection, and to whom she had administered every friendly aid.

The account which is given us of this transaction must be considered in a two-fold view;

I. As an historic fact—

The fact itself is set forth in the foregoing chapter—

[Jabin, king of Canaan, had mightily oppressed the children of Israel for twenty years. At last they cried unto God; who directed Deborah, a prophetess, to take immediate measures for their deliverance. She commissioned Barak to raise ten thousand men; and promised, in God's name, that Sisera, the captain of Jabin's army, should be drawn to him and delivered into his hands. The event corresponded with the prediction: Sisera was

was defeated; and he fled away on foot, and sought refuge in the tent of Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, with whom he was at peace. Jael received him most kindly, supplied him with necessary refreshment, covered him with a mantle, and gave him every reason to expect safety under her protection. But, when he was asleep, she took a hammer, and drove a long nail through his temples and through his head: and then went out to the door of her tent, and brought in Barak to see his enemy dead upon the floor.]

And what are we to think of this fact?—

[Supposing it to be unauthorized by any commission from Heaven, we cannot hesitate to pronounce it one of the vilest crimes that ever was perpetrated. Some have endeavoured to extenuate it, by saying, that she did not *promise* not to betray him. But this is a mere subterfuge: whether she *promised* or not, *in words*, her whole conduct was equivalent to the strongest promise: and she was guilty of the basest treachery that we can find on record in the annals of the world. She murdered a man who was at peace with her, and whom she had undertaken to protect.

Thus strongly have we spoken on the occasion, in order that our subsequent views may not be misinterpreted.

Here a question naturally arises; If the action was so base, how comes it to be so highly commended? how comes a prophetess to pronounce such an eulogy upon her, as to call her "the most blessed of women," for doing that which was in itself such a flagrant act of injustice and cruelty? I answer, (as we before answered in the case of Ehud,) that God is not bound by the laws which he has given to us; and that he may dispense with those obligations which men owe to each other, in order to advance his own purposes in the way he sees fit. He may, as we before observed, order Abraham to slay his son: and therefore he might equally order Jael to slay Sisera; and might make known his mind with equal certainty to her as to him. And, that he did give her this commission, we can have no doubt: for, on account of Barak's unbelief, Deborah told him that *he* should lose part of the honour which he might have acquired; and that "God would sell Sisera into the hand of a woman." Moreover, this whole chapter is a tribute of praise to God on account of the transaction, wherein Jael in particular is celebrated as having performed a most acceptable service to the Lord.

Our proud hearts are apt to rise up in rebellion against God on this occasion; and to ask, how such an order could consist with his perfections? But let us be careful how we presume "to reprove God[a]." We forget that he is the Creator of all, and "may

[a] Job xl. 2.

"may do what he will with his own[b];" and that "he giveth not account of any of his matters[c]." Let us remember too, that we are no more than mere worms, which, *as creatures*, have no claim to existence for one moment; and, *as sinners*, deserve to be in hell: and that, consequently, it is not possible for God to do us any injustice. If, however, we still be disposed to quarrel with this dispensation, the answer of St. Paul to such objectors must be resorted to; "Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God?" Consider the objections to which that reply was made; and it will be found abundantly sufficient for every other objection that can be raised[d] — — —]

Let us next consider this account,

II. As an emblematic record—

The words which close this divine hymn, clearly shew that we are to consider the history in this view[dd]. The transaction was an emblematic representation,

1. Of the judgments that await God's enemies—

[Sisera's army was, humanly speaking, invincible, especially by such an handful of men as Barak could muster, and even the greater part of them unarmed, except with such weapons as they might hastily collect[e]. Indeed his mother and friends had not the least doubt of a successful issue to the conflict. But when his time was come, he and his army were wholly destroyed: and the very steps which he took for the destruction of God's people, God himself overruled to effect his overthrow[f]. Thus it shall be with all the oppressors and persecutors of God's Church and people: how potent soever they may be, and however secure they may think themselves, "their judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not[g]." They exult in the thought of what they will effect: but God "laugheth them to scorn, for he seeth that their day is coming[h]." The very plans which they concert for the destruction of the Church, God will often overrule for their own destruction[i]: or, if no particular judgment come upon them in this world, the time is quickly coming, when they would be glad to have "the rocks and mountains fall upon them to cover them from the wrath" of an avenging God. They think themselves strong now: but "will they be strong in the day that HE shall deal with them, and will they thunder with a voice like his?" O that they were wise

[b] Matt. xx. 15. [c] Job xxxiii. 13. [d] Rom. ix. 16—24.
[dd] Compare ver. 31. with Ps. lxxxiii. 2, 3, 4, 9, 10.
[e] Judg. iv. 13. with v. 8. [f] Judg. iv. 6, 7.
[g] 2 Pet. ii. 3. [h] Compare Ps. ii. 3, 4. with xxxvii. 12, 13.
[i] Mic. iv. 11, 12.

wise and would consider this, ere they "be suddenly destroyed and without a remedy!"]

2. Of the triumphs that are prepared for the Lord's people—

[The Church at large, or individuals in it, may be reduced, like Israel of old, to great distress; but they shall surely triumph at last. However weak you may be in yourselves, you have no cause to fear; for God is on your side; and will suffer neither sin nor Satan to have dominion over you[k]. You need not direction or assistance from man; you need not say to any human being, "If thou wilt go with me, I will go; but if thou wilt not go with me, I will not go[l]:" for God is with you; and "through him you shall be more than conquerors." His voice to every one of you is, like that of Deborah to Barak, "Up, for this is the day that the Lord hath delivered thine enemies into thine hand: is not the Lord gone out before thee[m]?" The very "stars in their courses shall fight for you[n]," rather than that you shall be subdued. This is the testimony of all the Prophets; nor shall any one that trusts in it be disappointed of his hope. See how the sun bursts through the clouds that obscured it in the early morn, and shines forth in its might: so shall you rise above all your enemies, and shine forth in everlasting glory[o].]

The subject *addresses* itself particularly,

1. To those who are in affliction—

[What was the remedy to which Israel had recourse, when their affliction pressed sore upon them? It was prayer: "they cried unto the Lord." And is not the same remedy open to us? is it not also as effectual as ever? Is the Lord's hand shortened that it cannot save, or his ear heavy that it cannot hear? He has given the direction, "Call upon me in the time of trouble, and I will hear thee, and thou shalt glorify me:" "nor will he ever suffer any to seek his face in vain" ———]

2. To those who have been delivered from it—

[Delay not to render thanks to your Almighty Deliverer. Whatever means he may have used, remember that HE is the first great Cause, "the author and giver of every good and perfect gift." Stir up yourselves then to glorify him, like Deborah of old; "Awake, awake, Deborah; awake, awake; utter a song." Call to mind also the various circumstances both of your affliction and deliverance; that nothing may be omitted which may enhance the mercy in your eyes, or give glory to your heavenly Benefactor. This is a matter of great importance: if you rest in

[k] Rom. vi. 14. & xvi. 20. [l] Judg. iv. 8. [m] Ib. ver. 14.
[n] Judg. v. 20. [o] ver. 31.

in general acknowledgments, you will feel but weak emotions of gratitude: but if you search out occasions of praise, you will soon be filled with wonder and amazement at the mercies vouchsafed unto you.]

## CLXXIX.

### GIDEON'S VICTORY OVER MIDIAN.

Judg. vii. 19—22. *So Gideon, and the hundred men that were with him, came unto the outside of the camp in the beginning of the middle watch; and they had but newly set the watch: and they blew the trumpets, and brake the pitchers that were in their hands. And the three companies blew the trumpets, and brake the pitchers, and held the lamps in their left hands, and the trumpets in their right hands to blow withal; and they cried, The sword of the Lord and of Gideon. And they stood every man in his place round about the camp: and all the host ran, and cried, and fled. And the three hundred blew the trumpets: and the Lord set every man's sword against his fellow, even throughout all the host.*

WE are so familiar with Scripture history, that we cease to be struck with the most astonishing events. Great events in profane history are handed down from generation to generation, and are made subjects of universal admiration: but those which are related in the Bible are passed over with little notice. How can we account for this? Is it that, in the one, the feats of *men* are seen, and in the other the feats of *God?* and that we are gratified with contemplating whatever advances the glory of *man*, but have no disposition to magnify and adore our *God?* We fear that this is the true solution of the difficulty. But, if we feel not as we ought, we cannot be insensible to the display of God's power and goodness in the passage we have now read. Indeed the whole history of Gideon is so curious and instructive, that, instead of confining ourselves to the particular action specified in the text, it will be desirable,

I. To notice the circumstances which led to this victory—

Here we must notice,

1. His

1. His call to his work—

[He was by nature qualified for the office of a Deliverer, being "a mighty man of valour." Yet that circumstance would not have justified so hopeless an attempt as that which he engaged in, if he had not been called to it by God himself. But God (under the appearance of an Angel) called him to it, and assured him of his presence in the undertaking, and of ultimate success in it: "*Thou* shalt save Israel out of the hands of the Midianites: have not I sent thee? Surely I will be with thee; and thou shalt smite the Midianites as one man[a]."

In confirmation of his call, God accepted his offering, which he caused to be miraculously consumed by fire out of the rock; and thereby gave him an undoubted evidence that he was that same Almighty Being, who had formerly commissioned Moses to deliver Israel from their Egyptian bondage[b].]

2. His preparation for it—

[The work to which he was called was exceeding arduous; and it was desirable that before he undertook it, he should have an opportunity of proving his zeal for God, and of seeing the sufficiency of God to carry him through it. God therefore ordered him to begin the work of reformation in his father's house; to cast down the altar of Baal, and cut down the grove where that idol was worshipped, and build an altar to Jehovah, and offer a bullock for a sacrifice upon it. This was impracticable by day, because the worshippers of Baal would have interfered to prevent it: but he effected it by night; and executed in every respect the divine mandate. The people, as might be expected, demanded that he should be given up and put to death: but, notwithstanding his father was a worshipper of Baal, he was overruled by God to protect his son, and to threaten with death any that should take part with Baal; since, if he was a god, he was able to plead for himself; and, if he was not, his worship ought not to be upheld[c].

Thus, by this successful effort, Gideon was prepared for that far greater work which he was now to undertake against the Midianites.]

3. His encouragement to it—

[The attempt, according to human appearance, was madness itself; so dispirited was the state of Israel, and so great the power of their oppressors[d]. We wonder not therefore that he should request of the Lord a sign, whereby he might be assured of success in his enterprise. He begged of God that a fleece of wool should be put out into the open air, and be filled with dew, whilst all the surrounding ground was dry: and on that sign being

[a] Judg. vi. 12—16. [b] ib. ver. 17—24.
[c] ib. ver. 25—32. [d] ib. ver. 2—6.

being given him, he entreated permission to reverse the sign, the fleece being kept dry, whilst all the earth around it was wet. The events corresponding with his desires, he was assured, that God could make that distinction between the Midianites and him, which was necessary to a successful issue of his contest with them.

Thus encouraged, he entered on the office that had been assigned him; and went with two and thirty thousand men whom he had assembled, to attack the Midianites. But God knew that if so many were to go down to the attack, they would ascribe the victory to their own prowess: and therefore he ordered Gideon to dismiss from his army all who were afraid: in consequence of which no less than 22,000 forsook his standard in one night. Still there was the same objection to his retaining ten thousand; and therefore God undertook to determine, by a particular test, who should go to the attack: those who on being taken to the water bowed down on their knees to drink, were not to go; but those who *in a more temperate and self-denying way* took up water in their hands and lapped it, as a dog lappeth, were to be the chosen band. But by this test no less than 9700 were cut off from his army, and he was left with only three hundred persons to undertake this arduous work[e].

It should seem that this reduction of his numbers filled him with some secret misgivings. God therefore graciously offered him a further sign, whereby his faith should be confirmed, and his fear altogether dispelled. This was a sign that should be given him by the enemy themselves. He was to go down with his servant to the enemy's camp, and hear what they themselves said. Accordingly he went, and heard one telling a dream that he had had, namely, that a cake of barley-bread had rolled down a hill into the camp, and had overturned a tent: which dream was immediately interpreted by his comrade, as importing that this cake was no other than the sword of Gideon, and that God had delivered Midian into Gideon's hand[f]. This perfectly satisfied the mind of Gideon: he had no doubt now but that God would fulfil his promise: and in a full assurance of faith he instantly arranged every thing for the encounter[g].]

4. His success in it—

[The means he used were, no doubt, suggested to him by God himself. The little band were armed, not with sword and shield, but with a pitcher, a lamp, and a trumpet. They were instructed to surround the camp, and, at a given signal, to break their pitchers, display their lights, and sound their trumpets, and, without moving from their places, to cry, "The sword of the Lord and of Gideon." This was executed in due order: and instantly a panic struck the whole host of Midian, who in their fright

[e] ib. ver. 33—39. & vii. 8. [f] ver. 9—14. [g] ver. 15—18.

fright destroyed each other; and, when put to flight, were followed by the other troops that had been dismissed, and were thus entirely destroyed[h].

Thus have we taken a connected view of the most important circumstances, in order that we may have our minds fully prepared for such observations as naturally arise from them.]

We proceed then,

II. To suggest some instructions arising from them—

Every part of the history is truly instructive: we may learn from it,

1. To undertake nothing in our own strength—

[Though God addressed Gideon as "a mighty man of valour," Gideon did not presume upon his character, or think himself competent to the undertaking: yea, though commissioned by God himself, he shrunk back from the undertaking, saying, "Oh, my Lord, wherewith shall I save Israel? behold my family is poor in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house." We mean not to commend *unbelief*, but to express our approbation of *humility*. It is well to be diffident of ourselves, and to confide only in the Lord our God. We are all called to "wrestle, not only against flesh and blood, but against all the powers of darkness:" but "who is sufficient for these things?" Let us bear in mind that "we are not of ourselves sufficient even to think a good thought as of ourselves," and that "our whole sufficiency is of God"———]

2. To draw back from nothing to which we are called—

[When Gideon was assured that God had called him to the work, he cheerfully addressed himself to the performance of it. His question seems to have resembled that of the blessed Virgin, rather than of Zacharias[i], and to have flowed from a gracious, rather than an unbelieving, principle. Thus should we act: our great labour should be to ascertain the mind and will of God; and being informed of that, we should, like Paul, when he was called to preach the Gospel, "not confer with flesh and blood," but set ourselves to discharge our duty to the uttermost. We indeed cannot expect our call to any particular office to be made as clear as Gideon's; but, having discovered the duties of our respective callings, we should make no account either of difficulties or of danger, but determine instantly, and in all things, to approve ourselves faithful unto God———]

3. To doubt of nothing wherein God promises his aid—

[Gideon

[h] ver. 19—25. [i] Luke i. 18, 34.

[Gideon is particularly commended for his faith, to which his success in this enterprise is more especially ascribed[k]. And what can we desire more than a promise of God's presence and co-operation? "If he be for us, who can be against us?" God has said, "Fear not, for *I am with thee;* be not dismayed, for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee, yea, *I will help thee*, yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness:" though therefore our enemies come forth like Goliath, and we be only like David with a sling and a stone, we need not fear the issue of the contest; for "we shall be more than conquerors through Him that loved us"———]

4. To take the glory of nothing which God does by us—

[God is a jealous God: and the ground of his reducing Gideon's army to three hundred men was, lest, if their numbers bore ever so small a proportion to the number of their enemies, they should ascribe to themselves the honour of the victory, instead of giving all the glory of it to God. In like manner has God treasured up for us a fulness of all blessings in Christ Jesus, and required us to live by faith upon *him*, and to receive out of *his* fulness our daily supplies of grace and strength. He would have us to glory in Christ alone, and to possess now the very spirit which we shall have in heaven, when with all the glorified saints we shall cast our crowns at his feet, and ascribe salvation to God and to the Lamb for ever and ever———]

[k] Heb. xi. 32, 33.

## CLXXX.

### GIDEON PACIFIES THE EPHRAIMITES.

Judg. viii. 1—3. *And the men of Ephraim said unto him, Why hast thou served us thus, that thou calledst us not when thou wentest to fight with the Midianites? And they did chide with him sharply. And he said unto them, What have I now done in comparison of you? Is not the gleaning of the grapes of Ephraim better than the vintage of Abi-ezer? God hath delivered into your hands the princes of Midian, Oreb, and Zeeb: and what was I able to do in comparison of you? Then their anger was abated toward him when he had said that.*

WE are apt to admire great military exploits, and to account men honourable in proportion to the victories they have gained: but there is a victory over ourselves that far more dignifies a man, than the most extended conquests over others. We certainly regard

regard Gideon as one highly renowned in the feats of war: but his defeat of all the Midianitish hosts with only 300 men, armed with pitchers, lamps, and trumpets, is less worthy of admiration, than the self-possession he exercised towards the offended and objurgatory Ephraimites. Solomon has weighed as in a balance the different characters, and has decided in favour of him whose victory is over his own spirit: "He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit, than he that taketh a city[a]."

In the transaction before us we see,

I. Whence it is that unreasonable men take offence—

There is scarcely a society or even a single family to be found, where the different members walk in perfect harmony together: in most circles there are frequent disagreements: one or other of the members is unreasonable in his expectations, and by the unquietness of his own dispositions spreads dissatisfaction and disquietude all around him. The inquiry, "Whence come wars and fightings among you?" St. James anwers by an appeal to our own experience; "Come they not hence, even from the lusts that war in your members[b]?" The chief sources of offence are discernible in the conduct of the Ephraimites. It arises,

1. From the pride of our own hearts—

[The Ephraimites had evidently a high conceit of their own dignity, and were offended that Gideon had not paid as much deference to them, as they supposed themselves entitled to. And from this root of bitterness it is that so many disputes arise. "Only by pride cometh contention," is the testimony of God himself[c]. See the proud man, swelling with a sense of his own importance: if you differ from him in judgment, or act contrary to his will, yea, if you do not comply with his humour in every thing, he is quite indignant, and bursts forth into a rage. Even the best-meant endeavours cannot always please him: as an inferior, he cannot brook the least restraint: as a superior, he never thinks that sufficient homage is paid him: and as an equal, he cannot endure that others should exercise the liberty which he arrogates to himself[d]. To what an extent this domineering

[a] Prov. xvi. 32. [b] Jam. iv. 1. [c] Prov. xiii. 10. [d] Prov. xxviii. 25.

neering principle will prevail, we may see in the instance of Nebuchadnezzar; who, because of the conscientious refusal of the Hebrew youths to bow down to his idol, "was full of fury; and the form of his visage was changed against them; and he ordered the furnace to be made seven times hotter than usual," in order to destroy them[e]. Truly there is no principle in the heart more adverse to the peace and happiness of mankind than this.]

2. From envy at others—

[Great honour accrued to Gideon and the Abi-ezrites from the victory that had been gained: and the Ephraimites were grieved that others should possess a glory, in which themselves had no share. Hence they broke forth into revilings against Gideon. The same principle also prevails more or less in all: "The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy[f]:" and how nearly it is allied with wrath, we see from those words of Eliphaz, "Wrath killeth the foolish man; and envy slayeth the silly one[g]." The examples of Cain[h], and Joseph's brethren[i], and Saul[k], sufficiently mark the murderous tendency of this malignant passion. One evil peculiar to it is, that it makes excellence itself the object of its attack; as Solomon has observed, "For every right work a man is envied of his neighbour[l]." Hence that pointed question, "Who can stand before envy[m]?" Not the benevolence of the Apostles, nor the blameless conduct of our Lord himself, could ward off its malignant shafts: and wherever it exists, it will be attended with "strife, railings, evil surmisings, and perverse disputings[n]."]

3. From impetuosity of spirit—

[The Ephraimites would not give themselves any time for reflection or inquiry, but instantly began with violent invectives. It should seem that they were a hasty people, full of pride and wrath: and on another occasion precisely similar to this, they suffered for it in no slight degree; for no less than two and forty thousand of them were slain in consequence of it[o]. Had they been at the pains of making inquiry, they would have found that Gideon had committed no offence at all: he had acted altogether by the direction of God: and so far was he from being at liberty to increase his army by the accession of the Ephraimites, that he was necessitated to reduce the thirty-two thousand troops which he had raised to three hundred. Thus it is that innumerable quarrels arise, when a moment's inquiry would shew, that no reason for them exists, or at least no reason for such resentment as is felt by the offended person. Behold David, when Nabal

[e] Dan. iii. 19. [f] Jam. iv. 5. [g] Job v. 2. [h] Gen. iv. 5.
[i] Gen. xxxvii. 11, 18. [k] 1 Sam. xviii. 8, 9.
[l] Eccl. iv. 4. [m] Prov. xxvii. 4. [n] 1 Tim. vi. 4. Jam. iii. 16.
[o] Judg. xii. 1—7.

Nabal had refused him the refreshments which he desired: nothing short of the death of Nabal and all his adherents was deemed a sufficient atonement for his offence. But when Abigail had brought David to reflection, he found that his vindictive purposes were highly criminal; and that, if his anger was not groundless, it far exceeded that which the occasion called for[p]. In a word, this hastiness of temper prevents men from listening to the dictates of reason, and makes them deaf to every consideration of truth and equity.]

The readiness with which unreasonable men take offence, makes it important to inquire,

II. How judicious men may pacify it—

Truly admirable was the conduct of Gideon on this occasion: and his success may well recommend it to our imitation. Indeed the general rules deducible from it are as good as any that can be suggested. When a person is offended at us without a cause, we should endeavour, as far as circumstances will admit of it, to calm his mind,

1. By patience and forbearance—

[Not a word of recrimination dropped from the mouth of Gideon. He might perhaps have justly said, that when the Ephraimites knew his determination to oppose the Midianites, they had never offered their services, or come forward to assist him in the undertaking: but, when the danger was over, they were ready to impute evil to him for omissions which were chargeable only on themselves. But he did not so much as glance at any thing that might either betray irritation in his mind, or strengthen it in theirs. Though "they did chide sharply with him," he bore it with a meekness that was truly amiable and praiseworthy. Now this was an excellent way to conciliate their minds, even if he had deserved all the blame that they imputed to him: Solomon justly observes, that "yielding pacifieth great offences[q]." It is recrimination that fans the flame, and causes it to burst forth into destructive quarrels. The common progress of disputes may be seen in the case of Israel and Judah after the death of Absalom; where, each of them justifying his own cause, the result was, that the dispute on both sides grew, till the accused were more incensed than even the accusers; and "the words of the men of Judah were fiercer than the words of the men of Israel[r]." Silence therefore is the best remedy, at least till the offended person is so far calmed as to listen readily to the voice of reason: and though the advice of Solomon appears at first

[p] 1 Sam. xxv. 21, 22. [q] Eccl. x. 4. [r] 2 Sam. xix. 41—43.

first sight as paradoxical and absurd, yet it is the best that can be offered; "Leave off contention before it be meddled with[s]:" for it will be difficult enough to leave it off when once it is begun.]

2. By humility and self-denial—

[Gideon might justly have said, "If God has been pleased to honour me, why should that give any umbrage to you?" But he forbore to take to himself the credit that was his due, or to claim from them the approbation he had merited at their hands. Thus he hid from them the light which had pained their eyes, and cast a veil over the actions which had provoked their jealousy. This was a striking instance of that "charity which vaunteth not itself, and seeketh not her own[t]." This is a disposition which tends no less to the preservation of our own happiness than it does to the conciliating of those who are offended at us: for when once we are willing to forego the honour to which we are entitled, it will appear a small thing to us to be censured without a cause; seeing that such censures only reduce us to the place which we were previously in our own minds prepared to occupy. And it will almost invariably be found true, that, as men are ready to hate those who arrogate honour to themselves, so will they be more easily reconciled to those who are humble and unassuming.]

3. By commendation and love—

[Gideon, instead of loading his adversaries with blame, was glad to search out causes for commending them. The Ephraimites, though they offered not themselves in the first instance, were of great service in pursuing and destroying the routed foe. They took the two hostile princes, Oreb and Zeeb: and though this was only the gleaning of Gideon's vintage, yet does Gideon speak of it as incomparably greater than any thing that had been done by him. And it is particularly deserving of notice, that *this* was the word which produced the desired effect; "Then their anger was abated, when he had said *that*." Thus it appears, that "a soft answer turneth away wrath[u];" and that, if we would blunt the edge of other men's displeasure, we should study to conform ourselves to that sublime precept; "Let nothing be done through strife and vain-glory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves[x]."]

On this subject we would found a word or two of ADVICE;—

1. Be cautious not too hastily to take offence—

[Innumerable circumstances may exist, which, if known to us, would make us form a very different judgment of men and things,

[s] Prov. xvii. 14. [t] 1 Cor. xiii. 4, 5. [u] Prov. xv. 1. [x] Phil. ii. 3.

things, from that which at first sight we have entertained[y]. To weigh, and consider, and inquire, is the part of true wisdom: but to be precipitate is a certain indication of folly[z]. ——]

2. If offence be taken at you, labour to the uttermost to pacify it—

[This was a leading feature in the character of Jesus[a]; and it must be so in that of all his followers[b] —— "To feed our enemies, and heap coals of fire on their heads," is the Christian's duty: therefore, "Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good[c]."]

[y] See this illustrated Josh. xxii. 11—34. [z] Eccl. vii. 9.
[a] Jam. i. 19, 20. [b] Eph. iv. 1—3. & Col. iii. 12, 13.
[c] Rom. xii. 20, 21.

## CLXXXI.

### GIDEON CHASTISES THE MEN OF SUCCOTH AND PENUEL.

Judg. viii. 15—17. *And he came unto the men of Succoth, and said, Behold Zebah and Zalmunna, with whom ye did upbraid me, saying, Are the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna now in thine hand, that we should give bread to thy men that are weary? And he took the elders of the city, and thorns of the wilderness, and briers, and with them he taught the men of Succoth. And he beat down the tower of Penuel, and slew the men of the city.*

CONSISTENCY is essential to the character of a child of God. But pious persons are very apt to err in judging of the consistency of others: they would have been ready to condemn the conduct of Paul in relation to many things which he did at one time and forbore to do at another. We do not in general make sufficient allowance for a change of circumstances, which may not only warrant, but demand, a change of conduct. All would admire the gentleness and forbearance of Gideon, when the Ephraimites blamed him so vehemently for not summoning them to the battle against the Midianites[a]; but probably they would accuse him of severity and injustice towards the men of Succoth and of Penuel: whereas his

[a] ver. 1—3.

his firmness in chastising *these* was no less proper under his peculiar circumstances, than his kindness in forgiving *them*. The two cases were not at all parallel: the Ephraimites at least thought honourably of the cause in which Gideon was embarked; but the men of Succoth and of Penuel treated it with contempt. Now the cause was that of God himself: and for despising it, the men of Succoth and of Penuel deserved all that they suffered. Let us consider,

I. The punishment inflicted on them—

*The provocation* they gave was exceeding *great*—

[Gideon had already destroyed 120,000 of the Midianitish army; and was now pursuing with his 300 men the remnant, who had escaped the general carnage. He had crossed over Jordan, and was following them with all possible ardour; but his men having been engaged all the preceding night and day without any intermission or any refreshment, were faint: Gideon therefore, in passing through Succoth, a city of the tribe of Gad, requested in the kindest manner some provisions for his men: but the elders of the city only insulted him, and endeavoured to weaken his hands by deriding the vanity of his attempts. Gideon would not lose any time in debating the matter with them, but warned them, that when God should have delivered the Midianites into his hand, he would scourge them all with briers and thorns[b]. He then went forward to Penuel, a neighbouring city; but was insulted by its elders precisely as he had been by the men of Succoth. It should seem that the men of Penuel confided in a tower which they had, and thought themselves safer in that, than they could be by any efforts of Gideon, or of God himself in their behalf. Gideon therefore threatened them with heavier vengeance, when God should have delivered Zebah and Zalmunna into his hands: for, though their ingratitude was the same with that of the men of Succoth, there was in their answer somewhat more of atheistical impiety, which was the ground of a severer sentence against them[c].]

*The punishment* he inflicted on them was *just*—

[Gideon pressed forward, weak and faint as he was, and came upon the Midianites, when they conceived themselves to be perfectly secure: and God blessed his efforts, so that the 15,000 Midianites were destroyed, and their two kings, Zebah and Zalmunna, taken, without the loss of a man belonging to the host of Gideon. Instantly did Gideon return, with his royal captives, to the two ungrateful cities which had refused him sustenance;

[b] ver. 7. [c] ver. 9.

sustenance; and executed on their elders the vengeance he had threatened: he punished those of Succoth with briers and thorns; and those of Penuel with death, and the destruction of their boasted tower.

Now we say that this was *just*. Had the injury which he had sustained been purely personal, it would have become him to pass it by, and to leave the punishment of it to a righteous God, who says, "Vengeance is mine; I will repay." But he acted as a Magistrate who was authorized to punish the treason of which these persons had been guilty. Considered as an act of ingratitude only, it was exceeding sinful; for what could be more base than to refuse a meal to those who had at the peril of their own lives delivered the whole nation from the yoke of Midian; and were now, though only 300 in number, following the remaining fugitives, fifty times as numerous as themselves, in order to extirpate them entirely! But it was treason, both against the State, and against God: it was the very way to prevent the execution of Gideon's designs against the enemies of God and his people: and, if God had not miraculously renewed the strength of the victors, this refusal of food to them would have done more to vanquish them than all the hosts of Midian had been able to effect. If Gideon had demanded that the men of Succoth and of Penuel should join in the pursuit, he would have required no more than he was authorized to do[d]: and he might justly, considering whose cause he was engaged in, have punished them severely for a refusal[e]: but when his request was so moderate, and his necessity so urgent, and the probable consequences of their refusal so injurious to the whole nation, he did right in making an example of such wicked traitors.]

Having vindicated this act of justice, let us proceed to notice,

II. The lessons it suggests to us—

It is very instructive to us both,

1. In a civil view—

[The men of Succoth and of Penuel well illustrate the character and conduct of many amongst ourselves. The burthens of war must of necessity be borne by all the nation: and methinks they should be cheerfully borne by every member of the community: for, to whom do we owe our security, but to those who are standing forth in our defence, and, under God, are combating our enemies with success? It is true, we feel the pressure of the taxes as a burthen; and by means of them we are deprived of comforts which we might otherwise enjoy: but what are our privations

[d] The Ephraimites had not only acknowledged this, but had thought themselves slighted because it had not been done, ver. 1.

[e] See Judg. v. 23.

vations in comparison of those which are experienced by our fleets and armies? Little do we think what they have to bear; or what obligations we owe to them for exposing themselves to so many fatigues and dangers in our defence. Shall we then grudge to the State whatever is necessary for their support? Is not the murmuring on account of our burthens, and the striving to elude them, highly criminal? The men of Succoth and of Penuel had some excuse for their ungenerous conduct: for they intimated, that, by contributing to aid Gideon in the pursuit, they should only bring on themselves the heavier vengeance from the Midianites, as soon as ever they should have recovered from their panic. But what excuse have we? Their interest seemed to lie on the side of neutrality; but ours is altogether on the side of energy and exertion. Let us only consider what our enemies would exact of us, if they were to reduce us under their power: truly, "their little finger would be heavier than the loins" of our own governors: instead therefore of grudging what is necessary for the support of our Government, we should rejoice and bless God for the security that we enjoy under their watchful care.]

2. In a religious view—

[The whole of that astonishing transaction tends to inspire us with confidence in God, and to encourage our exertions in his cause. But there are two lessons in particular which we shall do well to learn from it: the one is, *To prosecute the spiritual warfare under all discouragements ourselves;* and the other is, *To put no discouragements in the way of others.*

That we shall find discouragements in our warfare is certain; sometimes from the number and power of our enemies; sometimes from the fewness and weakness of our friends; sometimes from the inefficacy of our past exertions; and sometimes from the protracted continuance of a struggle which we had fondly hoped to have seen terminated long before. But we must go forth, like Gideon, in the strength of the Lord, and, though "faint, must yet be pursuing[f];" nor must we ever look for rest, till we have gotten the final victory over all our enemies. We must remember, Whose cause it is; Under whose banners we are enlisted; Whom we have for our Guide and Protector; and, Whose word is pledged for our final success. What though he reduce the number of our friends to ever so low an ebb? What though he send us forth with no better armour than a trumpet and a lamp? What though our enemies be so great and numerous, that, after having been vanquished by us a thousand times, they still appear, according to human apprehension, invincible by such an arm as ours? What though we be so feeble that we seem incapable of continuing the contest any longer? Shall we give over? No: we must still fight on, assured of victory; knowing,

[f] ver. 4.

knowing, that "when we are weak, then are we strong;" that "God will perfect his own strength in our weakness; and that, "if God be for us, none can" possibly succeed "against us."

At the same time that other lesson must be attended to, Not to put any discouragement in the way of others. Almost all people are ready to obstruct, rather than to aid, the Christian in his spiritual progress. Those of the same family and kindred will discountenance his zeal; and even some who profess to be of the true Israel, will represent his duties as impracticable, and his efforts as hopeless. But God is indignant with those who would weaken the hands of his people. He would have us rather encourage one another to the utmost of our power. His command is, "Strengthen ye the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees; say unto them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not; your God will come and help you[s]." It is said of our Lord, that "he will not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax, but will bring forth judgment unto victory:" let us, like him, "carry the lambs in our bosom, and gently lead that which is with young;" yea, let us so unite our efforts with theirs, that we may be sharers in their triumphs, and partakers of their glory.]

[s] Isai. xxxv. 3, 4. & Heb. xii. 13.

## CLXXXII.

### JOTHAM'S PARABLE.

Judg. ix. 7—15. *And when they told it to Jotham, he went and stood in the top of Mount Gerizim, and lifted up his voice and cried, and said unto them, Hearken unto me, ye men of Shechem, that God may hearken unto you. The trees went forth on a time to elect a king over them; and they said unto the olive-tree, Reign thou over us. But the olive-tree said unto them, Should I leave my fatness, wherewith by me they honour God and man, and go to be promoted over the trees? And the trees said to the fig-tree, Come thou and reign over us. But the fig-tree said unto them, Should I forsake my sweetness and my good fruit, and go to be promoted over the trees? Then said the trees unto the vine, Come thou and reign over us. And the vine said unto them, Should I leave my wine, which cheereth God and man, and go to be promoted over the trees? Then said all the trees unto the bramble, Come thou and reign over us. And the bramble said unto the trees, If in truth ye anoint me king over you, then come and put your trust in my shadow: and if not, let fire come out of the bramble, and devour the cedars of Lebanon.*

THE method of instructing by parables is of great antiquity: it obtained among the Jews from the earliest period of their history: but the first that is recorded, and indeed the first extant in the world, is that which we have just read. The peculiar excellence of that mode of instruction is, that it arrests the attention more forcibly, and conveys knowledge more easily, than a train of reasoning could do; and convinces the judgment, before that prejudice has had time to bar the entrance of truth into the mind. The parable before us is exceeding beautiful, and admirably adapted to the occasion on which it was spoken. That we may open it fully, we shall consider,

I. The occasion of it—

Gideon had refused the promotion which all Israel had offered him—

[After the expulsion of the Midianites, "the men of Israel proposed to make Gideon their king, and to perpetuate that honour in his family: but Gideon, having no reason to think that this invitation was from God, and being desirous that God alone should be the king of his people, declined the honour, saying, "The Lord shall rule over you[a]." At the same time, wishing to preserve the remembrance of those astonishing victories which God had wrought for them by him, he requested his victorious soldiers to give him the golden ear-rings which they had taken from the Midianites, together with the chains which were about the necks of their camels: and with them he made a very splendid ephod, which was consecrated unto God. Whether he intended to make use of this ephod in the place of that which had been made for Aaron[b], we cannot say; but we have no doubt of his having sincerely intended to honour God by it; though, alas! through the proneness of the heart to superstition and idolatry, "it became a snare to him, and to his house[c]." In a word, he affected not honour for himself and his family, but desired only that God should be glorified.]

After his death however, Abimelech aspired to, and gained, the throne of Israel—

[Gideon had seventy sons by many different wives; and, by a concubine, one, whom he called Abimelech. This bastard-son, being of an ambitious mind, made use of his mother's relations to impress the minds of the Shechemites with an idea, that all the seventy sons of Gideon would be so many petty tyrants among them; and that it would be better for them to have one king over

[a] Ch. viii. 22, 23. [b] Exod. xxviii. 6—12. [c] Judg. viii. 27.

over them, than so many; and that, if they were of that opinion, they would do better to choose Abimelech, who was related to them, than any of the others, who had no particular interest in their welfare. Having thus insinuated himself into the favour of the Shechemites, he prevailed upon them to supply him with money out of the treasury of Baal-berith, their idol: and with that "he hired vain and light persons" to go with him and murder all his seventy brethren. *What an awful proof is this, of the cruel nature of ambition, which could instigate him to such an inhuman act; and of the ease with which instruments may be procured to perpetrate any evil that the human heart can conceive!* The deliberation with which this bloody man executed his project, was truly astonishing: one would have supposed, at least, that he would murder them all hastily in their beds; but, as though he delighted in that accursed work, he brought them all forth, and "slew them all *on one stone*[d]." Jotham alone, the youngest of them all, escaped: and, when he was informed that Abimelech had been made king, he availed himself of an opportunity which some public meeting of the Shechemites afforded him, to stand on Mount Gerizim, and address the principal inhabitants. His address was short, as one would naturally expect: but it was much to the purpose; and it was contained in the parable which we have read, together with a brief application of it to their own conduct.]

Such was the occasion of the parable: we proceed to explain,

II. The import—

Two leading truths are contained in it;

1. That worthless men affect the honours which the wise and good decline—

[The character of the wise and good is fitly represented by those valuable trees, the olive, the fig, and the vine. The olive-tree was useful for the honouring of God in the sacrifices, and man in his attainment of royal or priestly honours: the fig-tree was productive of most delicious fruit: and the vine, by its generous juices, cheered the heart of man, at the same time that it afforded acceptable libations unto God. What more beautiful images could have been found, whereby to portray the character of a man who lives only to honour God, and to benefit his fellow-creatures? Such a man was Gideon; who, sensible of the snares and difficulties of royalty, was desirous rather to do good in the station in which God had placed him, than, by an elevation to a higher sphere, to encumber himself with anxious and unproductive cares[e].

On

[d] ver. 5, 18.

[e] The marginal reading is, "*To go up and down for* other trees;" which is strongly expressive of this idea.

On the other hand, the bramble fitly represented a worthless person, who, grasping at power, is ready to obtain it by any means; and, whilst he is extravagant in his demands of confidence, is cruel and oppressive to all who are not subservient to his will. Such exactly was Abimelech: he promised great things to Shechem, whilst he gave them, in the first moment of his advancement, an evidence of his atrocity, and a sure pledge of his future tyranny.

What was primarily intended to mark the characters of Gideon and Abimelech, is applicable to man in every age. The wise and good are unambitious. If clearly called of God to any office, they undertake it, as Gideon did, for the Lord's sake: but they do not seek advancement for themselves: they do not affect situations of dignity and power: they cultivate an humble and contented mind; and study rather to be *good* than great. Not so the noisy demagogue, who depreciates and defames others only the more effectually to exalt himself.]

2. That they who unduly affect honour, and they who unjustly confer it, will prove sources of misery to each other—

[This was intimated in the parable, but more fully explained in the subsequent application of it. Jotham appealed to the consciences of the men of Shechem, whether they had acted as they ought to have done towards Gideon and his family: if they could say they had, he wished them every benefit from Abimelech's administration, which they themselves could desire: but, if not, then he warned them that they would prove a curse to each other[f].

And this also is a general truth, that Usurpers seldom fail of being a curse to the people whom they govern, and that those who aided them in their usurpation rarely continue faithful to them in a day of adversity. Were an instance wanted to confirm this truth, we need only look at all the Powers of Europe who have been successively cajoled and injured by the great Oppressor of the Continent; who, having waded to his throne through seas of blood, stops not at any measures that may consolidate or extend his ill-gotten authority. And what returns he will receive from those who have contributed to his exaltation, time will shew: but, as he is even now regarded by them as a plague to the earth, it will be a miracle if they do not, when a fit opportunity occurs, prove also a plague to him[ff].]

This

[f] ver. 16—20.

[ff] How abundantly has this been verified, since the Tyrant's Retreat from Moscow! Many of his Allies in the invasion of Russia contributed afterwards to his downfall, and to his present humiliation at St. Helena.

This parable was in the nature of a prophecy; of which we now proceed to consider,

III. The accomplishment—

[Never was a prophecy more exactly fulfilled. "The triumph of the wicked is short." For three years Abimelech enjoyed the fruit of his wickedness: but then God "sent an evil spirit between him and the Shechemites," and stirred them up to "deal treacherously with him[g]." What the cause of their disaffection was, we know not: but they so hated him, as to set assassins to lie in wait for him, and destroy him[h]. Their disloyalty appearing, one soon rose up to foment the division, and to head the conspiracy. Turbulent persons are never wanting to fan the flames of discord, and to seek their own elevation on the ruin of others. Such an one was *Gaal*, who, though probably a Canaanite, proposed himself as the fitter person to govern the State, and encouraged them at a drunken revel to curse and execrate Abimelech. *Zebul* however, a chief officer in the city, retained, though covertly, his allegiance to Abimelech; and sent him word of all that passed, together with directions for crushing the conspiracy. At the same time he endeavoured to lull asleep the fears of Gaal, so that he might be taken by surprise; and, when Gaal could no longer be deceived, he urged him, in the same derisive strain, to go forth and meet his adversary in the field of battle: but no sooner had Gaal gone forth, than Zebul interposed to cut off his retreat to the city[i]. The plan of Zebul succeeded: Abimelech speedily overthrew Gaal and his adherents; then he proceeded to fight against the other conspirators in the city; and, having taken the city, he slew all its inhabitants. Some indeed took refuge in a tower; which however, by cutting down branches of trees from an adjacent wood, and setting them on fire, he instantly destroyed, together with a thousand people that were in it. Having desolated thus the whole place, he beat down the city, and sowed it with salt, in token that its destruction should be perpetual[k].

The revenge of Abimelech, one might have supposed, would by this time have been satisfied: but it was not so: for, as there were many dissatisfied persons at Thebez also, a neighbouring city, he went and slew them also: and, when some of them also took refuge in a tower, he proceeded to use the same stratagem against them: but being grown incautious from success, he went too near the tower, so that a woman threw a piece of a millstone upon his head, and brake his scull: and he, indignant at the thought of being killed by a woman, "ordered his armour-bearer to slay him, that it might not be said, A woman slew him[l]."

Behold

[g] ver. 23. [h] ver 25. [i] ver. 26—38, 41.
[k] ver. 39—49. [l] ver. 50—54.

Behold now how exactly the parable was verified! "God sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and his subjects," *on purpose* that their ingratitude to Gideon and his family might be punished[m]; and the issue of the contest, *as the historian remarks*, was a literal accomplishment of Jotham's prediction; Abimelech and the Shechemites mutually proving a scourge and a curse to each other[n].]

From this history then we may LEARN,

1. To be unambitious in prosperity—

[Never had man a better opportunity to gratify ambition than Gideon: yet he forbore to do it, and preferred the station which God in his providence had assigned him. In this he was truly wise. The acquisition of power is, in fact, the dereliction of ease. The increase of comforts by means of it bears no proportion to the increase of cares. Solomon in all his grandeur found nothing but "vanity and vexation of spirit." Jeremiah's advice to Baruch is worthy the attention of all: "Seekest thou great things unto thyself? seek them not."]

2. To be patient in adversity—

[Great indeed was the cause of complaint which Jotham had both against Abimelech and the Shechemites: yet behold, here were no invectives against them: he contented himself with simply declaring in God's name his testimony against them. Had he been an uninterested person, he could not have borne his testimony in milder terms. This is a pattern which we shall do well to follow. Let us therefore "not render evil for evil, or railing for railing," but "commit ourselves to Him who judgeth righteously."]

3. To look forward to a future time of retribution—

[We may appear for a season to succeed, and to reap a pleasant fruit from the iniquities we have sown. But what did Abimelech's success avail him at the end of three years? and what thinks he of all his murders at this hour? So we may appear to succeed in the acquisition of unlawful pleasures or dishonest gains: but what shall we reap from such practices in a little time? and what comfort will our confederates in iniquity afford us at the last day? Now the vile seducer or the base adulterer may rejoice in, and with, his guilty companions: but what execrations will they mutually vent against each other, when God's time is come! Know ye, Beloved, that "evil pursueth sinners;" and "though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not be unpunished."]

[m] ver. 23, 24. [n] ver. 56, 57.

## CLXXXIII.

### JEPHTHAH'S VOW.

Judg. xi. 30, 31. *And Jephthah vowed a vow unto the Lord, and said, If thou shalt without fail deliver the children of Ammon into mine hands, then it shall be, that whatsoever cometh forth of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the children of Ammon, shall surely be the Lord's, and I will offer it up for a burnt-offering.*

VOWS were common under the Mosaic dispensation: they were even encouraged by God himself, in order that his people might have opportunities of manifesting the love that was in their hearts by offerings that were not enjoined, and services that were not commanded. In cases of difficulty, where it appeared of more than ordinary importance to secure the divine favour and protection, the Patriarchs had resorted to vows, and bound themselves, in case he should vouchsafe to them the desired blessing, to render unto him according to the benefits he should confer upon them. Thus Jacob, when he had just left his father and family in order to seek in a foreign land a refuge from his brother's vengeance, vowed, that, if the Lord would be with him and restore him to his home in peace, he would take God entirely for his God, and devote to him a tenth of all that he should possess[a]. In the time of Moses, the whole people of Israel resorted to the same measure, in order to obtain success against the Canaanites[b]. This, it must be confessed, has a legal appearance, and looks like offering to make a bargain with God: but vows may certainly be made in perfect consistency with the liberal spirit of the Gospel: for it is intimated, that under the Gospel, yea even in the millennial age, such a practice should obtain[c]; and we know that Paul both made a vow himself[d], and united with others in services to which by a voluntary engagement they had bound themselves[e].

The

[a] Gen. xxviii. 20—22. [b] Numb. xxi. 2. [c] Isai. xix. 21.
[d] Acts xviii. 18. [e] Acts xxi. 23, 24.

The vow of Jephthah has engaged the attention of learned men in all ages: but they are by no means agreed as to the import of it. We propose,

I. To explain his vow—

It must be confessed, that the Jewish writers in general, together with their great historian Josephus, were of opinion, that Jephthah offered his daughter to the Lord as a burnt-offering. Of the same opinion also were the generality of Writers in the early ages of the Christian Church. Multitudes also of the most approved authors amongst the moderns take the same side of the question. But we are constrained to differ from them; and the more attentively we have weighed their arguments, the more fully are we persuaded that Jephthah did not offer up his daughter as a burnt-offering, but only devoted her to the service, *the exclusive* service, of the Lord.

In confirmation of this opinion, we would call your attention to the particular circumstances of the vow:

1. The making of it—

[In opposition to the idea of his offering her up for a burnt-offering, we say, that *No pious man would have made such a vow*. Jephthah was undoubtedly a pious man, as his whole history declares: for at his first acceding to the proposals of his countrymen to stand forth for their deliverance, he laid the matter before the Lord[f]: and his vow was expressive of his affiance alone in God for success: besides which, he is celebrated by St. Paul as one of those eminent men who obtained a good report through their faith[g]. Moreover, he was at this time under the influence of the Spirit of God[h]. Now can we suppose that such a man, under such influence, should deliberately vow to God that he would commit murder? that he would murder the first person who should come forth to congratulate him, whether it might be man, woman, or child, yea even if it should be his own, his only daughter? or, if a dog or other unclean animal should come forth, he would offer *it* up for a burnt-offering? Could he conceive that this would be pleasing to the Deity, and that such a vow as this would be likely to procure success? Had not the law said, "Thou shalt not kill[i]?" and had not God expressly forbidden his people to imitate the heathen

[f] ver. 11. [g] Heb. xi. 32. [h] ver. 29. [i] Exod. xx. 13.

heathen in offering *human* sacrifices[k]? Had not the law prescribed, that if a man should *unintentionally* kill his *slave*, he should be punished[l]? and could he imagine that the law permitted him *intentionally* and *deliberately* to kill his own *daughter*? It may be said, that the Spirit ordered him to offer up this sacrifice, just as God commanded Abraham to offer up his son Isaac: but I ask, Where is any such thing expressed in this history? and why, if the Spirit of God had ordered a human sacrifice to be made, and he under the influence of the Spirit had vowed to offer one, whence came the rending of his garment, and all his vehement lamentation, upon finding that his daughter was the appointed victim? If he had been called to Abraham's trial, we may well suppose that God would have given to him the faith of Abraham; or at least, that, if he had so greatly failed in this duty, he would not have been so highly commended as an example of faith. But, we say again, that there is not the smallest intimation that the Spirit of God did give any such order to him: nor can we conceive that if, for the trial of his faith, God had given it, he would have ever suffered it to be carried into execution; but would rather have interposed to prevent it, as he did in the case of Isaac.

But, as no pious man would have made such a vow, *so, if Jephthah had made it, the law itself had provided a ransom for her.* We have before said, that vows were encouraged under the law; and *persons*, as well as *things*, might be devoted to God. But if either persons, or things, were devoted to him, the law permitted that a valuation should be made of the devoted thing or person, and that the money should be regarded as a ransom for it, or an offering be presented in its stead. If a human being were devoted, the estimation should vary according to the sex and age of the person: but if it were a beast, then the offerer should give in addition one fifth more than the estimated value as the price of its redemption[m]. When the enemies of God and their cities or possessions were, *as accursed things*, devoted to destruction, they were not to be redeemed at all: they were accursed of God himself, as the Amalekites and Canaanites were, and were therefore not to be spared[n]: and Saul, in sparing Agag, whom *God* had devoted to destruction, sinned as much as if he had murdered one whom God had ordered to be spared[o]. Now, if we call to mind how eminently conversant Jephthah was with the history of Israel, so as to be able to refute all the claims of the king of Ammon[p], we can feel no doubt but that he was well acquainted with the law that prescribed the mode in which devoted things were to be redeemed: indeed his vow was evidently founded on the knowledge of that law: for if a dog had met

[k] Deut. xii. 31. [l] Exod. xxi. 10. [m] Lev. xxvii. 2—13.
[n] Lev. xxvii. 29. [o] 1 Sam. xv. 3, 9, 22, 23, 32, 33.
[p] ver. 12—27.

met him first, he would never have dared to offer *that* in sacrifice to God: consequently he would never have made his vow so *indefinitely*, if he had not known that the law admitted of an exchange, in case the devoted thing should be improper to be offered.

But supposing that *he* was ignorant of this law, were the high-priest and all the priests in the kingdom ignorant of it? and, when the execution of the vow was postponed for two months, and great lamentation was made all that time throughout the kingdom on account of the vow, was there no person in all Israel who once thought of this law? If but one person had thought of it, would he not have been very glad to mention it? and would not the mention of it have been most acceptable to Jephthah, when it would have put an immediate end to all his mourning and lamentation? Would he not have been glad enough to pay thirty shekels, about 3*l.* 8*s.* 6*d.*, the sum prescribed by the law, to save the life of his daughter? But it may be said, that this was a period of gross darkness; and that idolatry with all its horrid rites prevailed to a great extent[q]. To this I answer, that though idolatry had recently prevailed, *this* was a time of singular reformation; for the people had put away the strange gods from among them, and served the Lord[r]:" and, in such a state of mind, considering what obligations they felt to Jephthah, even if they had not thought of this law, they would have interposed to rescue his innocent daughter from destruction; just as the people, at a later period of their history, rescued Jonathan from the hands of Saul, when the sentence, to which his father's oath had doomed him, was just ready to be executed[s].

These arguments, we grant, would have no weight against an express declaration of holy writ: but it is no where said, that such a vow as doomed her to death was ever made. On the contrary we affirm, that *the terms used by Jephthah do not imply any such thing*. The word that is translated *And*, is not unfrequently used in a disjunctive sense, and should be translated *Or*. In many places it *must of necessity* be translated *Or*, and actually is so translated in our Bible[t]: and in the margin of our Bibles it is so translated in the very passage before us. Thus translated, the words of Jephthah involve no difficulty: he says, "Whatsoever cometh forth of the doors of my house to meet me, shall surely be the Lord's, *or* I will offer it up for a burnt-offering;" that is, it shall be consecrated to the Lord; or, if it be fit to be offered in sacrifice to the Lord, (as a lamb or kid would be,) it shall be offered to him as a burnt-offering. It is really strange, that, when so easy and obvious a translation occurs, any one should prefer one so replete with difficulties, as that which has been usually received.

Thus

[q] Judg. x. 6. [r] ib. ver. 16. [s] 1 Sam. xiv. 45.
[t] See Exod. xxi. 16, 17. Lev. vi. 3, 5. 2 Sam. ii. 19.

Thus in relation to *the making of the vow*, we have shewn, *that no good man would make such a vow* as this is supposed to be; that, *if made, the law admitted of an exchange;* and that *the terms used on the occasion do not imply* that she should be put to death.]

2. The execution of it—

[Observe the language used by all parties on this occasion, and it will manifestly lead to a very different conclusion from that which has been usually adopted.

Observe the language of *his daughter's acquiescence.* There is a delicacy in it which throws considerable light on the subject. In noticing the effect of the vow upon herself, she studiously avoids the mention of it. This, if we understand the vow as subjecting her to a state of perpetual virginity, is what might have been expected from her; but, if she was to be offered in sacrifice to God, there is no reason whatever why so solemn an event should not have been expressed in plainer terms. In requesting a respite of the sentence, which involved in it a seclusion from the world, somewhat like that which has been practised by Nuns in later ages, she does express what in the first instance she had only glanced at; "Let me alone two months, that I may go up and down upon the mountains and *bewail my virginity*, I and my fellows." Here she mentions that which constituted the substance of the vow. Had she been consigned to *death*, she would rather have bewailed her *premature death*, and not merely her virginity. If it be thought, that her piety kept her from bemoaning her *death*, and that she bemoaned her virginity merely as a circumstance that seemed to render her death opprobrious; I answer, that the same piety that reconciled her to death, would certainly have reconciled her to the opprobrium of dying in a virgin state; exactly as Isaac was willing to forego his prospects in relation to the promised Seed, when he yielded up himself to be slain in sacrifice to God.

If it be said, that, on a supposition she was doomed only to a state of perpetual virginity, there was no occasion for her having two months given her to bewail her fate, since she would have had her whole life wherein to bewail it; I answer, that, in the apprehension of Jewish women, it was a great calamity to be childless, since they had not the honour of increasing the number of the Lord's people, or a hope that the Messiah might spring from them: and this was a peculiarly heavy calamity to *her*, because she was the only child of Jephthah[u]; and her doom cut her off from all prospect of raising up a seed who should inherit his honours, and follow his example. Therefore it was proper that there should be a public kind of mourning observed, not only in honour of her who thus freely sacrificed all her

[u] ver. 34.

her prospects in life, but in honour of Jephthah also, who in this instance exercised most eminent self-denial, and might be considered as almost dead.

Next observe the language in which is recorded *his performance of his vow*: "Her father did with her according to his vow which he had vowed: and she knew no man." Why is this latter circumstance mentioned, but to shew wherein the accomplishment of the vow consisted? Is it not strange that *this* should be mentioned so often, and her *death* be never once noticed, if indeed she was put to death? But, if she was only doomed to a state of perpetual virginity, the reason of the expression is clear enough.

In addition to all this, observe the language in which *the commemoration of the event* is mentioned: "It was a custom in Israel, that the daughters of Israel went yearly to lament the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite four days in a year." If she was dead, there was scarcely any adequate reason for the daughters of Israel to go four times a year to one particular place to lament her; for they might as well have lamented her at home: but if she was alive, and secluded from company all the rest of the year, there was reason enough why they should visit her then. But the word which we translate *to lament*, is in the margin of the Bible translated *to talk with:* and this assigns the true reason of those stated convocations: her female friends went *to condole with* her on the occasion, and to do her honour. Even the manner in which she is mentioned in this passage seems to bespeak her a *living* person; They went to talk with "the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite." Had she been offered in sacrifice to God, there would probably have been something more descriptive of her character: but, if she was still living, this is the only description of her that we should expect to find.

But there is yet a third source from whence we may derive arguments in confirmation of this point. We have noticed the vow in reference both to *the making*, and *the execution* of it: led us now proceed to notice,]

3. The honour God put upon it—

[In consequence of this vow, "God delivered the Ammonites into the hands" of Jephthah[x]. But would God have sanctioned in this manner a gross act of deliberate murder? Would not this have been the very way to deceive his people, and to make them think that he was pleased with such offerings as the heathen presented unto Moloch? And when in future ages he punished his people for offering human sacrifices, might they not justly have pleaded, that he in this instance had both approved and rewarded them?

Again: St. Paul, in his catalogue of eminent Believers, particularly

[x] ver. 32, 33.

larly mentions Jephthah, and with an express reference to this event. Jephthah had shewn his faith by looking to God for victory, and by going forth against the Ammonites in an assured dependence upon him, as the Protector of Israel, and the Rewarder of all that trust in him: and this act of his is a subject of high commendation with God himself. Now I ask, Would this act have been so commended, if it had been ushered in with such an impious vow, and been followed by such a deliberate murder? But if the vow imported only that whatsoever met him first at his return should be consecrated to God, and if, in consequence of that vow, he did with such steady self-denial proceed to the performance of it, then is God's approbation easily accounted for, even whilst we condemn the indefiniteness and rashness with which the vow was made.

It may be objected to this, that no other instance of devoting a person to virginity occurs. It is true: but neither does any other instance of devoting a person to death. The instance of Abraham and Isaac is not at all in point: for there the determination to offer Isaac was not the result of a rash vow, but of a divine command: and God had a right to dispose of Isaac's life in any way he pleased; but Jephthah had no right whatever over his daughter's life. The right usurped by wicked Saul over his son Jonathan (which however was properly and successfully resisted) will scarcely be brought in justification and support of such a claim.

It may further be objected, that parents had no right to devote a daughter to perpetual virginity. This also may be true[y]; but much less had they any right to devote her unto *death*.

The most specious objection however against our interpretation is, that, supposing he only devoted her to God, there was no reason why she should remain unmarried; since Samson and Samuel, both of whom were devoted to God from the womb, were both married. But the case is extremely different between a man and a woman: they were at liberty to serve God in any way that they judged to be agreeable to his will; but she, if she had married, would have been under the controul of her husband, who might in a variety of ways have interfered with such a discharge of her duties as the vow implied: and therefore it was necessary that she should remain unmarried, and that she should also be secluded in a great measure from society itself; *that* being the way in which a woman might serve the Lord, as men served him by waiting on him continually in the tabernacle.

As to the objection, that if he had only devoted her in the sense that we maintain, he would not have so deplored her fate, it has no weight; for as she was his only child, all the distress occasioned to her came with double force on him, who was thereby

[y] Some right of this kind however seems to be acknowledged; 1 Cor. vii. 37, 38.

thereby doomed, and by his own folly too, to have his name and posterity cut off from Israel.]

Such, we are persuaded, was the vow that Jephthah made: we proceed,

II. To suggest some instruction from it—

Both the father and the daughter affords us very instructive lessons. We may learn,

1. To avoid the rashness of Jephthah—

[We cannot be wrong in condemning this, since Jephthah himself lamented it. It may be thought that we are in no danger of imitating it: but what do we in rash oaths? do we not tread in the very steps of Jephthah? There is scarcely an office to which we can be introduced, whether civil or religious, that is not entered upon by first taking an oath to fulfil the duties of it. Yet if there be a post of honour or profit to be obtained, how little do men in general think of the oaths by which they are to gain access to it! Would to God that this matter were considered by the Legislature; and that penalties were substituted in the place of oaths! Verily "by reason of oaths the land mourneth," and the consciences of thousands are greatly burthened. I cannot but consider the frequency of oaths, the ease with which they are administered, and the indifference with which they are taken, as among the most crying sins of the nation.

There is another way also in which we follow the steps of Jephthah, namely, by undertaking so lightly the office of sponsors for the children of our friends. The providing of sponsors to supply the place of parents who shall be removed, or disqualified for the instruction of their children in the fear of God, is excellent: but the engaging solemnly before God to perform their office is no light matter. Let any one read the baptismal service, and see what it is that he undertakes; and then let him see what little attention is paid to these vows in general, or, perhaps, what little attention he himself has paid to them. It will be well if we lay this to heart in future. Peradventure we have, like Jephthah, inconsiderately opened our mouths to the Lord: let us then at least, like Jephthah, proceed to the performance of our vows. The duty we have undertaken may be difficult and self-denying; but if he, after having unintentionally devoted his only daughter to the Lord, would not go back, notwithstanding the sacrifice was so exceeding great, so neither should we hesitate to perform the most difficult of our vows.

But there is yet another way in which we follow the steps of Jephthah. Who has not in a time of sickness, or danger, or trouble, or alarm, determined with himself, that, if he should be delivered, he would devote himself more unto the Lord, and to the pursuit of heavenly things? Look back, all ye who have been restored

restored from sickness, ye who have been delivered from the pangs of childbirth, ye who have seen your friends or relatives cut off by death, ye who have been in a storm at sea, or been alarmed by thunder and lightning; look back, and call to mind the vows that are upon you; and see how Jephthah will rise up in judgment against you for your violation of them.

How this subject applies to *Ministers*, I need not say: but if I were addressing them, methinks the subject would apply with tenfold force to them, seeing that their vows were all taken with foresight and solemnity, and involve duties more important than pertain to any other situation under heaven.

But, whatever be their office or character, two things I would say to all: first, Be cautious in making vows; and next, Be conscientious in performing them. Inquire into the nature and extent of any engagements before you enter into them: for, as Solomon says, "It is a snare to a man to devour that which is holy, and after vows to make inquiry[z]." If we have rashly engaged ourselves to do what the law of God positively prohibits, we must recede from our vow, and humble ourselves before God for our temerity. The forty conspirators who swore that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul, and Herod who swore that he would give his daughter whatsoever she should ask of him, had no right to bind themselves to such an extent, and would have sinned less in violating, than they did in keeping, their engagements. But where our vows are practicable, they must be kept, even though the observance of them be attended with great cost and trouble[a]: and the attempting to set them aside by the plea of inadvertence or of difficulties attending the observance of them, will only deceive our own souls, and bring upon us the heavy displeasure of our God[b]. We remember the judgments which God inflicted upon the whole Jewish nation in the time of David, for Saul's impiety in violating an engagement which had been hastily contracted by Joshua four hundred years before in favour of the Gibeonites[c]: and much more will God visit upon us in the eternal world the violation of engagements entered into by ourselves. "Vow then unto the Lord," if ye see it good, "but pay it[d];" and say with David, "I will go into thy house with burnt-offerings; I will pay thee my vows, which my lips have uttered, and my mouth hath spoken, when I was in trouble[e]."]

## 2. To imitate the piety of his daughter—

[Very eminent was her deportment on this occasion. Great was her love of her country, great her love towards her father, great her reverence for an oath, and great her zeal for God. O that

[z] Prov. xx. 25. [a] Deut. xxiii. 21—23. [b] Eccl. v. 4—6.
[c] Josh. ix. 19. with 2 Sam. xxi. 1. [d] Ps. lxxvi. 11.
[e] Ps. lxvi. 13, 14.

that there were such a spirit in all the daughters of our land! Assuredly the conduct of this pious female may lead them to consider how much they are bound to consult the judgment of their parent's in relation to marriage: for though we do not think that a parent's authority extends to a prohibition of marriage, which is an ordinance instituted by God himself, yet we have no doubt but that it is the duty of children to pay a deference to the judgment of their parents, and never, unless in extreme cases, to form a connexion contrary to their commands.

Need I say however, that when engagements are formed, they are not to be broken? The whole world unites in condemning so base, so iniquitous a conduct, as that of repudiating a person betrothed. But it has been thought by some, that if one who has in his unconverted state formed an engagement, becomes converted, he may then break his engagement, because he is "not to be unequally yoked with an unbeliever." But does religion justify the violation of our vows? God forbid! The very thought is a libel upon God himself. None but the person with whom the engagement is made, can liberate us from our vows. If indeed a woman to whom one was engaged, were to disgrace herself by some gross misconduct, it might be a reason for refusing to continue the engagement with her, because she has ceased to be the person with whom the engagement was formed. So, if an engagement were formed with a person on account of his supposed piety, and he were to cast off all regard for piety, his change of character would warrant a termination of the contract that had been made with him; because the very grounds of the engagement are subverted. But where, for the gratifying of our own inclination, excuses are sought out for receding from an engagement, God himself will be the avenger of the injured party.

There is one point in particular which the conduct of this pious virgin may well impress on the minds of all who belong to the Established Church; I mean, the observance of those vows which were made for us in baptism——— Of those vows our parents will never have reason to repent; nor can we ever regret that they were made for us. No mournings, no lamentations will ever be excited by our performance of them. The ungodly world indeed may regret that we have renounced its ways and vanities; and Satan may regret that we have cast off his yoke; but all the saints and angels will rejoice; yea, "there is joy among the angels in the presence of God over one sinner that repenteth." Even God himself will "be glad and make merry with us," and will "rejoice over us to do us good." True it is, that such a consecration of ourselves to God is difficult and self-denying; but it is our truest wisdom, and our highest joy. To all of you then I say, "Dedicate yourselves to God by a perpetual covenant

covenant not to be forgotten[f];" yea, "I beseech you by the mercies of God that ye yield yourselves to God *a living sacrifice*, holy and acceptable to God, which is your *reasonable service*[g]."]

[f] Jer. l. 5. [g] Rom. xii. 1.

## CLXXXIV.

### MANOAH'S VISION.

Judg. xiii. 22, 23. *And Manoah said unto his wife, We shall surely die, because we have seen God. But his wife said unto him, If the Lord were pleased to kill us, he would not have received a burnt-offering and a meat-offering at our hands; neither would he have shewed us all these things; nor would, as at this time, have told us such things as these.*

AFTER a brief mention of several Judges who successively bore sway in Israel, we are led to the contemplation of one, whose birth, as well as life, deserves particular consideration. To his parents a revelation was made respecting him; which revelation, together with the effects of it on their minds, will form the subject of our present discourse.

Let us notice,

I. The revelation made to them—

[The Israelites for their iniquities were brought under the power of the Philistines, who oppressed them sorely and for a long period. But God of his own grace and mercy raised up unto them a deliverer. Other deliverers had been raised up at once, and at the precise time that the deliverance was to be effected: but, in the present instance, the person who was to be God's instrument of good to the nation, was not even conceived in the womb. He was to be born, as Isaac and Jacob had been, of a mother who was barren; in order that he might more eminently appear to be a special gift of God. "There was a man of the family of the Danites, whose name was Manoah: and his wife was barren, and bare not. And the Angel of the Lord appeared unto the woman, and told her, that she should conceive and bear a son," who should be devoted as a Nazarite to the Lord, and should in due time become, in part at least, a saviour to his country[a]. The law relating to Nazarites required a total abstinence from wine, or strong drink, or from any thing unclean[b] — — — And as his consecration to this state was to commence

[a] ver. 2—5. [b] Numb. vi. 2—8.

commence from his first formation in the womb, his mother was immediately to observe all that kind of abstinence which was required of the Nazarite himself, and to continue it till the child should be both born and weaned. This occurrence she mentioned to her husband, together with the charge given to herself respecting the abstinence that was required[c]. Manoah, being strong in faith, entertained no doubt respecting the accomplishment of the Angel's words: but being desirous that the mercy intended to the nation should not be obstructed by any error or neglect on his part, he besought the Lord, that the same person should be sent to them again, to teach them more fully whatever was necessary for them to know, or do, respecting the child. *The visit was repeated*, according to his desire; and *the testimony was confirmed* by a visible display of the Divine power. Manoah, not knowing who this angel was, whether he was only a man, or an angel in human shape, or whether he was not the Angel of the Covenant, even the Son of God himself in human shape, requested permission to set before him a banquet, or an offering, as might be most suited to his character: but when he had presented an offering, fire, probably from the rock or from heaven, consumed the sacrifice; and the Angel ascended in the flame to heaven; and thereby testified the acceptance both of their persons and their sacrifice.]

Let us now notice,

II. The effect produced upon them—

Great was the faith both of Manoah and his wife: but she, being the more eminent of the two, experienced a very different effect. The revelation produced,

1. In Manoah, fear—

[He now perceived and knew, that the person who had announced these tidings to him was God, in human shape: and therefore he conceived that both he and his wife must die. This idea was not without some foundation; for, when Moses had intreated the Lord to shew him his glory, the Lord said to him, "Thou canst not see my face; for there shall no man see me and live:" and for this very reason God put him into a cleft of a rock, and permitted him to see, as it were, only "his back parts[d]." And, when Jacob had been favoured with a visit from the same divine person in the shape of an angel, he expressed his astonishment that "his life was preserved[e]." Indeed, when only an angel has appeared to some of the most distinguished servants of the Almighty, they have been so agitated, as scarcely to retain possession of their minds[f]. We wonder not therefore at

[c] ver. 6, 7. [d] Exod. xxxiii. 20—23. [e] Gen. xxxii. 29, 30.
[f] Judg. vi. 22. Rev. xix. 10.

at his apprehensions; but we the more admire the composure of his wife.]

2. In his wife, confidence—

[She argued in a very different way. She considered the mercies already vouchsafed to them as tokens for good: for why should God confer such singular honour upon them, if he intended to kill them? Why did he accept at their hands the burnt-offering? Why did he stoop to give them such information? Why give them such gracious promises? Was all this done to mock them? Indeed, if he should kill them, how could the promises be fulfilled? or for what purpose were they given? This was a just mode of arguing; for such mercies were both evidences, and pledges, of his love: and therefore were rather to be considered as earnests of future blessings, than as harbingers of ill. This was precisely the view which Paul entertained of the mercies conferred on him by God, "who," says he, "delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver: in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us[g]:" and it is the true light in which every instance of his goodness should be considered.]

Let us LEARN then from hence,

1. To guard against low and unworthy thoughts of God—

[It is really no uncommon thought, even among good people, that their blessings are too great to be of any long duration. This sentiment does not arise from a view of the instability of human affairs, but from an apprehension that a continuance of their blessings is too great a thing to expect even from God himself, and that his grace, though rich, is not sufficiently extensive for such a gift. But how dishonourable is this to God! and what an unworthy return for all his goodness to us! Why should we entertain such a suspicion? why should we harbour such ungenerous thoughts? why should we so limit his glorious perfections? Let such apprehensions be checked in their very first rise; and let us remember that his disposition to give exceeds our utmost capacity to receive[h].]

2. To make a just improvement of the mercies he bestows upon us—

[We shall do well to magnify the grace of God in our thoughts, and to inculcate upon others the same heavenly disposition. See how David argued, on a review of his past mercies; "Thou hast delivered my soul from death: wilt thou not deliver my feet from falling, that I may walk before God in the light of the living[i]?" And, when under peculiar temptation he was led to doubt the continuance of God's goodness to him, he checked himself,

[g] 2 Cor. i. 10. [h] Eph. iii. 20. [i] Ps. lvi. 13.

himself, by calling to mind the marvellous mercies that had already been vouchsafed unto him[k].

Nor is it for the comfort only of the person himself that God imparts these glorious hopes, but for the encouragement of others also: and this was the improvement which St. Paul made of his own happy experience[l]. Only let it be recollected what God has done for us, in giving up his Son to the accursed death of the cross; and can we then limit his tender mercies? can we doubt his willingness to give us any thing else[m]? Whether therefore it be for the comfort of our own minds, or for the encouragement of others, this is the thought which we should ever bear in remembrance, and enlarge our own expectations from God in proportion as he multiplies his benefits to us: we should look on all present blessings as the first-fruits that precede the harvest, or as the drop before the shower.]

[k] Ps. lxxvii. 7—11. [l] 2 Cor. i. 3, 4. [m] Rom. viii. 32.

## CLXXXV.

### SAMSON'S RIDDLE.

Judg. xiv. 12—14. *And Samson said unto them, I will now put forth a riddle unto you: if ye can certainly declare it me within the seven days of the feast, and find it out, then I will give you thirty sheets, and thirty change of garments: but if ye cannot declare it me, then shall ye give me thirty sheets, and thirty change of garments. And they said unto him, Put forth thy riddle, that we may hear it. And he said unto them, Out of the eater came forth meat, and out of the strong came forth sweetness.*

OF all the Judges that were in Israel, there was not one who committed so many faults, or by whom God wrought so many miracles, as Samson. His character is dark and inexplicable; insomuch that, if he had not been celebrated in the New Testament as an eminent Believer, we might reasonably have doubted whether he was possessed of any true piety. It must be recollected however, that his history is very short, and that the peculiarity of the dispensation under which he lived may account for many things, which, if done at this time and without the special appointment of Heaven, would be highly criminal. Besides, there might be in him many exercises

exercises of true piety, which, if they had been recorded, would have reflected a different light upon his character. The circumstances of his birth we have noticed: those of his marriage are next to be considered.

We cannot approve his conduct in connecting himself with a Philistine woman, though we commend it highly in not forming that connection without having first obtained the consent of his parents. It should seem as if his choice was sanctioned by God, because we are told, that "*it was of the Lord* that he sought an occasion against the Philistines[a]." But this circumstance does not necessarily make the action good: it may be that God only overruled the evil propensities of Samson, to accomplish his own purposes against the oppressors of his people[b]. However, in going down with his parents to Timnath, where the woman lived, he turned aside from them into a vineyard, and, when separated from them, was attacked by a young lion; whom, though unarmed, he rent, as easily as he would have rent a kid[c]. This he did through the mighty power of God: yet though the exploit was so astonishing, he concealed it utterly from his parents, and proceeded with them as though nothing particular had happened unto him[d]. What a rare instance of modesty was this! How few people are there in the world, who, if they had performed such an act, could have suffered it to remain hid from their dearest friends!

Having obtained the consent of the woman, he returned home, and, after a time, went to Timnath with his parents again, in order to take her for his wife and complete the nuptials. In his way, he turned aside again, to view the lion, whom he had slain. His intention probably was, to revive in his soul a sense of the Divine goodness to him, in having vouchsafed him so signal a deliverance: but behold, to his utter astonishment, he found a swarm of bees and

[a] ver. 4. [b] See Josh. xi. 20. 1 Kin. xii. 15.
[c] ver. 6. [d] ib.

and honey in the carcase of the lion*. Upon this he took of the honey, and eat it, and gave of it to his parents; but still concealed the miracle which had been wrought in his favour.

Every thing being prepared for the nuptials, he, according to the custom of the country, made a feast of seven days' continuance, at which thirty young men of the Philistines attended as his friends and companions. On this occasion he proposed to them a riddle, which will be profitable for our present consideration.

We will consider it,

I. As proposed on that occasion—

In the proposing of it we see no evil whatever—

[There was nothing improper in the riddle itself; it had nothing of an unbecoming nature couched under it; and it served as a trial of their ingenuity, and as an occasion of innocent mirth. Indeed its ultimate design was good, inasmuch as it would of necessity lead to a disclosure of the miracle that had been wrought, and consequently to a display of the power and goodness of Israel's God,]

But the manner of proposing it was replete with evil—

[A wager was laid with all the thirty companions respecting it: and that wager was in itself evil, as being both the root and fruit of covetousness. But, if any one be disposed to deny that the laying of wages is evil in *its nature*, no one, after reading this history, can doubt whether it be evil in *its tendency*. After three days' fruitless inquiry, the pride of these thirty companions was greatly mortified, and their covetousness excited to a most fearful degree. Not being able to bear the thought of losing their wager, they were filled with indignation, and threatened to burn the bride, together with her father's house, if she did not get the secret from her husband, and reveal it unto them. She, partly through fear, and partly from a partiality for them, laboured incessantly to gain from her husband the solution of the riddle. With this view, she wept before him during the remaining days of the feast, pretending that his reserve was a proof of his want of affection for her: and at last, having quite wearied him with her importunity, she obtained from him the secret, and then revealed it to them, and enabled them to gain the wager. He might justly have disputed the point with them, because they did not find out the riddle themselves, but obtained the knowledge

* ver. 8, 9.

knowledge of it by treachery. But, though he told them, "If ye had not plowed with my heifer, ye had not found out my riddle," yet he determined to pay the wager. But what a terrible resolution did he adopt! He determined to kill thirty men of the Philistines, and with their garments to pay the wager that he had lost. It is said indeed that "the Spirit of the Lord came upon him, and he went down to Askelon and slew them:" nor can we presume to question for a moment the justice of God in inflicting such judgments on the enemies of his people: He may take them off *when* he will, and *by whom* he will. But viewing the action by itself, we see in it altogether a most dreadful exhibition of the EFFECTS OF GAMING: in his friends, pride, covetousness, wrath, cruelty, and a confederacy to gain by fraud what they could not obtain in any other way: in his wife, hypocrisy, deceit, and treachery: in Samson, revenge, robbery, and murder. Perhaps in the annals of the whole world we shall not find a more striking display of the manner in which DEBTS OF HONOUR, as they are called, are contracted, acknowledged, and discharged. They are contracted at friendly and convivial meetings; they are acknowledged as of greater obligation than all the common duties of justice and charity; and the peace of whole families, that were wholly unconnected with the transactions, is invaded, yea, many are reduced to poverty, to prison, and to death, in order to discharge the debts contracted by the cast of a die, or by the turning up of a card. I may go further still, and say, that of all the sources of SUICIDE, this is by far the most fruitful. As to the endearments of friendship, or the sweets of conjugal affection, GAMING almost invariably produces the same result as in Samson's case, who left the place in disgust, deserted his treacherous wife, and had the mortification to find her afterwards in the embraces of one, who had just before professed himself his greatest friend.

Would to God that every Gambler in the universe would duly consider this history!]

We will now proceed to consider the riddle,

II. As applicable to other subjects—

We mean not to assert that it was *intended* to be applied to other subjects; though, considering the nature of that dispensation, and the peculiar circumstances of his history, it seems highly probable that every thing related of him had either a typical aspect or a mysterious import. We wish, however, always to lean to the safer side, and to suggest only in an *accommodated* sense any observations, which would

would admit of doubt, if applied to the Scripture as expressive of its *real* import.

With this caution we think the riddle may be applied,

1. To the Lord Jesus Christ himself—

[We know that he came down from the bosom of his Father, assumed our nature, sojourned many years upon the earth, and was at last put to death, even the accursed death of the cross. Now what good could we expect to result from this? Must we not rather suppose that the greatest possible evil must accrue from it, even the more aggravated condemnation of the whole world? Yet behold, "out of the eater came forth meat;" out of that, which we should have imagined would prove the destruction of the whole human race, has proceeded the salvation of ruined man! In this light was this mystery announced to Adam in Paradise; "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed: it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel[f]." Here the very wounds which Satan should inflict on the Lord Jesus, are spoken of as the means of effecting *his own* destruction. Isaiah speaks to the same effect, that the Messiah, by making his own soul an offering for sin, should secure to himself a seed who should live for ever[g]. In the New Testament, the same mysterious representations are given us of Christ: "He was made in the likeness of sinful flesh, that he might condemn sin in the flesh[h];" and that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is the devil, and deliver those who through fear of death were all their life-time subject to bondage[i]" ——— Amazing! that his death should be our life; his sufferings, our happiness; his humiliation, our glory! Yet so it is; for when he appeared to have been utterly vanquished, he rescued us from the hand of his great Adversary, and spoiled all the principalities and powers of hell, and triumphed over them openly on his cross."]

2. To every member of his mystical body—

[Great and multiplied are the trials of the Lord's people; yet the very billows that threaten to overwhelm them, bear them forward to their desired haven. View the trials which they have in common with the rest of mankind; these are sent them by God for their good[k], to improve their graces[l], and eventually to augment the eternal weight of glory that shall be given them at their departure hence[m] ——— View the trials which they meet with on account of their Christian profession; these are rather a ground of joy than of sorrow[n], and are occasions of holy glorying,

[f] Gen. iii. 15. [g] Isai. liii. 10, 12. [h] Rom. viii. 3.
[i] Heb. ii. 14, 15. See also 2 Cor. v. 21. & viii. 9. & 1 Pet. ii. 24.
[k] Heb. xii. 10, 11. [l] Rom. v. 3—5.
[m] 2 Cor. iv. 17. [n] Matt. v. 10—12.

glorying, inasmuch as they are the means of bringing to us much richer communications of divine aid [o], and of advancing that very cause which they are intended to repress [p].

Whether therefore the riddle was intended to comprehend these things or not, sure we are that it was not more applicable to the occasion on which it was used, than it is to the trials and deliverances of the Lord's people. But, in order to unravel this mystery, we must plow with the Lord's heifer, and seek the teachings of his Spirit [pp].]

Two words of ADVICE I would suggest as arising out of this subject:

1. Be frequent in reviewing the mercies of your God—

[There is no one who has not met with mercies and deliverances, on account of which he has reason to bless his God. And if we took frequent occasions of reviewing these mercies, what sweetness might we not extract from them; and that not for our own refreshment only, but for the comfort and refreshment of all connected with us! Though, as must frequently be the case, there may be things in our private experience which we cannot communicate even to our dearest friends, yet it would be impossible but that they must derive benefit from converse with us, after we ourselves have extracted the honey which God's dispensations towards us are calculated to afford. Let us then frequently turn aside even from our dearest friends, or in the midst of the most important business, to contemplate the mercies we have received; and we shall often be surprised at the rich stores of wisdom and consolation which we shall derive from them.]

2. Be not hasty to complain of his judgments—

[The troubles which we may be called to endure, may appear insupportable; and we may be ready to say, like Jacob, "All these things are against me." But, if we wait, we shall find, that they are all working for our good; and that though "clouds and darkness may be round about the Lord, righteousness and judgment are the basis of his throne." How many thousands after a time have been constrained to say with David, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted! Know ye, Beloved, that there is no trial so heavy, but, if you acknowledge God in it, it shall yield you a rich supply of heavenly consolations. The most striking illustration of this truth will be found in Jehosaphat's victory over three confederate armies: he was no less than three days in gathering the spoil [q] — — — Even that last of enemies, death itself, however formidable he may appear, shall yield sweets to the believing soul: the conflict with him may be severe; but the triumph over him shall be complete, and the fruits of victory eternal.]

[o] 2 Cor. xii. 9, 10. [p] Phil. i. 12.
[pp] 1 Cor. ii. 11. Mat. xiii. 11. [q] 2 Chron. xx. 2, 25.

## CLXXXVI.

### SAMSON'S CHARACTER AND END.

Judg. xvi. 28. *And Samson called unto the Lord, and said, O Lord God, remember me, I pray thee, only this once, O God, that I may be at once avenged of the Philistines for my two eyes.*

SCARCELY any part of Scripture has afforded more occasion for the doubts of sceptics or the scoffs of infidels, than the history of Samson. True it is, that many strange things are contained in it; but there is nothing in it which may not easily be accounted for by those who consider the nature of that dispensation, and the power of the God of Israel. The doctrine of the Resurrection appeared to many incredible: but our Lord said to them, "Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of God." The same reply we would make to any persons who would question the facts contained in this history. Samson was raised up by God on purpose to chastise the oppressors of Israel: and he was strengthened by God to effect that by his own arm, which seemed to require the united exertions of the whole nation. The circumstance of his being recorded as a man of faith and piety, gives a great additional interest to his history; because it is difficult to conceive how such inconsistencies should be combined in one person. We must not however attempt to cloke his impieties, because he was a saint; nor must we contradict an inspired Apostle, because he was a sinner: we should rather examine the different parts of his conduct, that so we may form a just estimate of his character: and we shall find our labour well repaid by many instructive lessons which his history will afford us.

Let us then consider,

I. His character—

It must be confessed that there was in him much amiss. He appears to have been too much actuated by,

1. A

1. A vindictive spirit—

[He knew indeed the peculiar commision given him: but yet in executing that commission he seems to have been influenced more by personal considerations than by true patriotism. His first slaughter of thirty Philistines was an act of revenge for the treachery which he had experienced at his bridal-feast, both from the bride herself, and all his pretended friends. When he returned afterwards to be reconciled to his wife, and found her given by her own father to another man, he executed the strange device of tying three hundred foxes together, two and two, by their tails, with a fire-brand or torch between each couple, and sending them in among the ripe corn, and the sheaves already cut, as also among the vines and olives; by which he devastated a great extent of country[a]. And, notwithstanding the Philistines themselves, on hearing of the reason of this conduct, avenged him on his wife and father-in-law by burning them to death, yet was he bent on further vengeance, and "slew the Philistines, hip and thigh, with a great slaughter."

After this we do not wonder that the Philistines sought to take him: we only wonder that his own countrymen did not embrace this opportunity of uniting with him to shake off the yoke of their oppressors. The tribe of Judah, amongst whom Samson had taken refuge, were only alarmed for their own safety; and, to screen themselves, engaged to apprehend him, and deliver him up to the Philistines. On their swearing not to destroy him themselves, Samson surrendered up himself to them; and suffered them to bind him with two new cords. The Philistines seeing him brought to them a prisoner, exulted greatly, and shouted aloud for joy: but their joy was soon turned into sorrow: for Samson burst the cords asunder, as easily as flax is consumed by fire; and, with the jaw-bone of an ass, which he found near him, he slew no less than a thousand men.

Now we do not mean to ascribe the whole of this to mere revenge; for we doubt not but that he was moved to it by the Spirit of God: but as Jehu afterwards was actuated by pride even whilst in other respects he was under a divine impulse, so was Samson too much under the influence of a vindictive spirit, whilst in other respects he was executing the designs of Heaven.]

2. A vain-glorious spirit—

[On this last occasion, when God had vouchsafed to him so great a deliverance, we should have expected that he would have been forward to give God the glory: but behold, he took all the honour

[a] This was not so impracticable a thing as we are ready to imagine: for the foxes in that country were very numerous; Cant. ii. 15. Ezek. xiii. 4. And Samson, being the chief Governor of the Jewish nation, would have many at hand to execute his commands.

honour to himself: "With the jaw-bone of an ass, heaps upon heaps, with the jaw-bone of an ass have I slain a thousand men[b]." How lamentable, that at such a time he should forget by whom this miracle had been wrought, and should so provoke to jealousy his heavenly Benefactor! This, it is true, is but too common: but how evil it is in the sight of God, we may see in the judgment inflicted for it on a heathen prince; who, when applauded for his eloquence, omitted to give the glory unto God: he was smitten with a mortal disease, and "eaten up with worms[c]."

3. A spirit of lewdness and incontinence—

[Here was his great failing. His first connexion in marriage was imprudent, but not sinful: but when that tie was dissolved by the death of his wife, he seems to have entertained no more thoughts of an honourable connexion, but addicted himself to an unlawful commerce with harlots. On one occasion, for the gratification of his sinful appetites, he put himself in the power of his Philistine enemies, and would have fallen a sacrifice to their rage, if he had not, beyond all reasonable expectation, risen at midnight from the harlot's bed, and, by supernatural strength, borne away the gates of the city which had been barred against him[d]. At another time he became enamoured of a woman, called Delilah: and the violence of his attachment to her was ere long the occasion of his death. Bribed by the Philistines, she sought to obtain from him information respecting the source of his great strength. He to amuse her, and to avoid a disclosure of so important a secret, told her various things, and submitted to various experiments; all of which issued in wonderful displays of his strength. But at last, "wearied to death" by her incessant importunity, he madly confided to her the secret, 'That his strength would vanish if only his locks were cut, since they were the badge of his Nazariteship, and the token or seal of his consecration to God: that seal once broken, the blessings which God had conferred upon him as a Nazarite would be forfeited and lost.' She now saw that she had gained her point, and prepared everything for his destruction. But would one not have thought that after such a disclosure he would have taken care not to put himself in her power? Yet behold, he soon afterwards fell asleep with his head in her lap; and afforded her an opportunity of employing a man to cut off his hair. This being done, she woke him, as on former occasions; and he, unconscious that the Lord had departed from him, went forth to shake himself as at other times. But now his strength was gone; and the Philistines seized him and put out his eyes, and bound him with fetters of brass, and made him grind in a prison. What an awful example is here of the miseries consequent upon unbridled lust! The infatuation it produces is beyond all conception. Verily the fetters of brass did not form a stronger bond for his feet, than ungoverned passions

[b] Ch. xv. 16. [c] Acts xii. 22, 23. [d] ver. 1—3.

passions make for the souls of men. Even reason and common sense often appear to fail the persons who are under their influence; insomuch that, with temporal and eternal ruin before their eyes, they rush on, till they bring upon themselves the miseries which they would not shun.]

How in the midst of all this wickedness can he be deemed a saint?

[We must make great allowance for the dispensation under which he lived, and the peculiar darkness of his times. But God forbid that we should vindicate such conduct as his! We apprehend that we must look for his piety rather in his latter days than at any time previous to his confinement at Gaza. Certainly his early days were marked with a pious submission to his parents: and it is probable, that, in his wonderful exertions, there was more of affiance in God, and a regard for Israel's welfare, than appears upon the face of the history. Moreover, when God rebuked his pride by suffering him to be in danger of perishing through thirst, he betook himself to prayer, and obtained a miraculous supply of water from God, by a well opened, *not in the jaw-bone*, as the translation imports, but *in Lehi*, as the marginal rendering more justly intimates[e]; the place being by anticipation called *Lehi*, in reference to this feat wrought by *the jaw-bone*. But in our text we see the greatest proof of his piety; as will more fully appear, whilst we consider,]

II. His end—

[Like Manasseh, this ill-fated Judge humbled himself in his affliction, and sought the Lord. Of this there is abundant evidence in his prayer. We grant that even here there seems to be a remnant of that vindictive spirit which we have before noticed: but we are willing to hope, that it was the cause of God and of Israel that he desired to avenge, rather than his own. The compliance of God with his request seems to warrant this conjecture. Indeed God's honour, if we may so speak, required such a signal act of vengeance to be inflicted on his enemies. The Philistines had assembled in a spacious edifice, to offer a great sacrifice to Dagon, their idol-god. To him they ascribed praise and honour, as having triumphed over the God of Israel. Thousands of their chief men and women were assembled in the place, and three thousand others on the roof; and Samson was brought forth, to be made an object of profane mirth and triumph. Then it was that Samson offered this prayer, and willingly devoted himself to death, that he might be an instrument of God's vengeance on them. The place was supported by two contiguous pillars: and God enabled him, by a wonderful exertion of strength, to pull down the

[e] "Enhakkore" means, *The well of him that cried*: and it continued in *Lehi* for many years. Ch. xv. 19.

the pillars in an instant, and thus to overwhelm at once the whole assembly. He fell indeed himself in the common ruin: but in his death he reminds us of that adorable Saviour, who "triumphed over principalities and powers upon the cross," and *by death* overcame him that had the power of death, and delivered those who through fear of death were all their life-time subject to bondage."

Here we cannot but contemplate the benefit of affliction. At Lehi, it was rendered serviceable to humble his pride; and at Gaza it brought him fully to repentance. We are ready to pity the degraded Judge of Israel when we see him reduced to such a state of misery by his enemies: but, if we pity the *man*, we congratulate the *sinner*; to whose final salvation these heavy trials were made subservient: and we congratulate all, whatever their afflictions be, who find them overruled for so great a good.]

This subject may well be IMPROVED,

1. For warning—

[How painful is it to see a person, who had been consecrated to God from his first conception in the womb, and who had given early hopes of fulfilling the desires of his parents and the designs of God, abandoning himself to the lawless indulgence of his appetites and passions! Yet thus it is with many, whose parents have watched over them with the tenderest care, and prayed for them with the most pious solicitude[f] — — — O that those who think lightly of such sins would ponder the cautions given them by Solomon[g] — — — and learn by times to "abstain from fleshly lusts, which *war against the soul!*"]

2. For encouragement—

[Great as was the sin of Samson, and justly as he merited the judgments which he brought upon himself, he found mercy of the Lord at last: and sure we are, that every penitent, whatever his crimes may have been, shall obtain mercy, if only he flee for refuge to that Saviour whose "blood cleanseth from all sin." We mean not by this observation to encourage any in the indulgence of sin, from a hope that they shall at last repent of it and be saved: for how do they know that they shall live to repent, or that, if their lives be prolonged, repentance will be given them? But, if any are desirous of humbling themselves for sin before God, let them not despair of mercy: let them rather expect, that God, who delighteth in mercy, will be gracious unto them; that he will refresh their weary souls in their deepest extremity[h]; and that, before he take them hence, he will give them victory over all their spiritual enemies; so that with their dying breath they shall sing, "Thanks be to God who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!"]

[f] Prov. v. 22. [g] Prov. v. 1—18. & vi. 25—28. & vii. 6—27.
[h] Isai. xli. 17, 18.

## CLXXXVII.

### MICAH'S FALSE CONFIDENCE.

Judg. xvii. 13. *Then said Micah, Now know I that the Lord will do me good, seeing I have a Levite to my priest.*

IN the history before us we see the commencement of that defection to idolatry, which at no distant period prevailed throughout all the tribes of Israel. The account in point of time precedes the reign of the Judges; for it occurred whilst Phinehas, the grandson of Aaron, was the high-priest, and consequently soon after the death of Joshua[a]. And, as being the first step of Israel's departure from God, it is related more circumstantially than its intrinsic importance seems otherwise to have deserved.

Micah was of the tribe of Ephraim. He had stolen from his mother a large sum of money which she had amassed: but from a dread of the curses which she had imprecated on the head of the guilty person, he had confessed his crime, and restored the money. She, pleased with the repentance of her son, would have given him the money: but he persisting in the refusal of it, she gave two hundred shekels of silver out of the eleven hundred which she had recovered, to form a graven image and a molten image; which she gave to her son, that he might have them to consult on all occasions. He on his part appropriated to them an apartment of his house for a temple, and consecrated his son to be a priest, to officiate before them with an ephod, which was made for his use[b]. But a Levite, who wanted employment, coming that way, Micah engaged him to minister before the idols; and concluded, that now he could not fail of being happy, since he had a duly authorized person for his priest.

Just at that time the Danites, who had not yet gained possession of all the land that had been assigned them, determined to go up to Laish, and seize it for their inheritance. But previous to their attack upon the inhabitants, they sent forth spies to search out

[a] Ch. xx. 28. [b] ver. 2—5.

out the state of the people, in order that they might the better judge what force to send against them, and what prospect there was of ultimate success. These spies coming to Mount Ephraim, where Micah lived, desired him to consult God through the medium of his idols; and received from him an encouraging reply. The report of the spies being favourable, six hundred Danites went forth upon the expedition; and coming to the house of Micah in their way, robbed him of his idols, and bribed his priest to accompany them, and to minister to them, as he had done to Micah. After they had succeeded in destroying the inhabitants of Laish, and in taking possession of their land, they set up these idols for their gods, and thus established idolatry, which in process of time spread over the whole land.

But it is not of idolatry in general that we propose to speak, but only of that particular modification of it which Micah established, and of the confidence which he expressed, when his newly-invented religion was made to bear some faint resemblance to the Mosaic ritual. This so exactly represents the false confidences to which ungodly men of every age resort, that we shall find it a very profitable subject for our present consideration.

We take occasion then from our text to notice,

I. The false confidences of ungodly men—

The worship established by Micah was a mixture of heathenism and of the Jewish ritual: it was heathenism, as far as it had respect to idols; and it was Judaism, as far as the use of an ephod and the ministration of a Levite were concerned. But, faint as its resemblance was to any thing authorized by God, it was sufficient in Micah's judgment to justify a most assured confidence in the Divine favour.

Somewhat of a similar mixture is the religion of the generality in the present day—

[It is a combination of *Heathenism*, and *Judaism*, and *Christianity*. It is in part *Heathenism*. What are the views which men in general have of God, but such as were entertained by the

the heathen philosophers? We have, it is true, clearer views of the unity of God: but of his perfections we have scarcely juster apprehensions than the Heathen had. Christians in general account of God as a Being who is but little interested about the affairs of this world, either in a way of present controul, or of future retribution. All, in their apprehension, is left either to chance, or to the will of man: and, provided only some of the more heinous sins be not committed by us, the state of our minds and the habits of our lives will pass altogether unnoticed by him. To see the hand of God in every thing; to expect from him the blessings which we ask at his hands; to be sensible of his favour or displeasure; to regard him as pledged to order all things for his people's good; and to rest assured, that he will fulfil to us his promises; is, in the estimation of the world at large, no better than presumptuous pride and enthusiastic folly: so entirely do they exclude Jehovah from the government of the world, and reduce him to the state of the god of Epicurus. In like manner the morality of men in general is simply that of the wiser heathens; the more refined and exalted requirements of Christianity being deemed unnecessarily precise, and absurdly strict. An entire deadness to the world, and devotedness to God, are never contemplated by them, but as the dictates of ascetic gloom or fanatical conceit.

Whilst in their principles they sink into Heathenism, in their adherence to forms they trench on *Judaism*. Every sect has its favourite forms, which, though of human origin only, are of more weight in the estimation of the generality than either principles or morals. A man may be sceptical in his principles, and licentious in his morals, and yet offend no one; but let him violate the forms which have been established by his own particular sect or party, and he will raise an outcry against him immediately. This is common both with Papists and Protestants, yes, and with protestants of every description. The rules of their own particular denomination are more to them than the oracles of truth; and a neglect or violation of a human institution is more heinous in their eyes than any departure from the commands of God. Thus it was with the Pharisees of old, who made void the law of God, and regarded only their own self-appointed usages; and thus it is at this day amongst multitudes who name the name of Christ.

A small portion of Christianity is for the most part added to this, to complete the system. Christ is acknowledged to have purchased for us such a relaxation of the Divine law as we are pleased to claim, and a power to save ourselves by any measure of obedience which we choose to pay to the code we have devised — — —]

Whilst such is the religion of the generality, it is supposed

supposed to constitute a just ground of confidence before God—

[Micah had now no doubts or fears but that all would go well with him both in this world and the next. And similar to this is the confidence which almost universally obtains amongst ungodly men. They have no fears but that God will do them good, because they are free from those crimes which outrage the common feelings of mankind, and serve God according to such rules as they have laid down for themselves. Whosoever dies in such a state, they send to heaven, as a matter of course; thinking, that to entertain a doubt of their safety would be the height of uncharitableness. It is surprising to what an extent their confidence is carried. The bare possibility of such persons having perished in their sins is never once contemplated by them: and, if a doubt were expressed respecting the issue of their own expectations, they would be quite indignant. Were a truly pious man to express the same confidence as arising from the promises of God, they would inveigh against his presumption: but in their own delusive speculations their confidence is such as to preclude all doubt. We may see this exemplified in the Jews of old. To have Abraham for their father, and the temple of the Lord for their religious services, was in their estimation sufficient ground of hope, though they lived in a constant violation of every known duty[c]. And precisely thus it is with the generality of Christians: they have been baptized into the faith of Christ, and they have lived according to a system which the world approves; and therefore they can say without fear, "I know that the Lord will do me good."]

But whilst ungodly men are buoying themselves up with such delusive hopes, let us contemplate,

II. Their bitter disappointments—

What was the issue of Micah's confidence? Was it justified by facts? Could his idols help him in the day of adversity? or did Jehovah interpose for his support? No: his idols could not even protect themselves: and when he complained of the spoilers who had robbed him, his pathetic expostulations were of no avail; and he was constrained to submit in silence to the loss of all wherein he had put his trust. Hear to what straits he was reduced: "Ye have taken away my gods; and what have I more[d]?" And thus will it be with the ungodly in the last day. Their "refuges of lies" will be swept away—

[The

[c] Matt. iii. 9. Jer. vii. 4. Isai. xlviii. 1, 2. [d] Ch. xviii. 24.

[The religion in which they now so confidently trust, will be proved a baseless fabric. No foundation will then stand, but that which God himself has laid: nor will any superstructure endure, but that which is able to abide the fiery test which shall be applied to it[e]. The law, which sinners reduce to their own standard, will be found immutable: the obedience which they pay to it will be found so imperfect, as to be incapable of affording the smallest ground of justification before God. The Lord Jesus Christ will then be seen to have been the only Saviour of sinful men; and his obedience unto death the only hope of a ruined world. The religion of the Bible will then appear to be, what it really is, the only means of a sinner's access to God, and acceptance with him.]

Their destitution and misery will be then complete—

[" Ye have taken away my gods; and what have I left?" may then be considered as the bitter lamentation of every self-deceived soul. How gladly would they who were once so confident in their expectations of bliss, take refuge, if it were possible, under rocks and mountains! How thankfully would they accept of utter annihilation, instead of a protracted existence under the wrath of God! In vain are now their pleas, " I thought that I was right." Why did they rest in vain conjectures? Why did they presume to substitute a system of their own in the place of that which God had revealed? Why would they not submit to be saved in God's own way? Why would they venture the salvation of their souls on plans and systems of their own devising? Alas! it is now too late to rectify their error: they are gone beyond redemption; and are consigned to those regions of darkness and despair, where not a single ray of hope can ever enter to dispel their gloom. " They have walked in the light of the sparks which they themselves have kindled: and now they lie down in sorrow[f]."

Thus it will be, whatever men may now say to the contrary[ff]; and, if they will not believe, they shall soon " see whose word shall stand, God's or theirs[g]."]

SEE then from hence,

1. The importance of having right sentiments in religion—

[If we consider religion only as influencing the mind in this present life, it is no unimportant matter whether we have such a vain system as men form for themselves, or such a grand and glorious system as God has revealed in his word. Compare that of Micah with that of Daniel and the Hebrew youths, and say, which of the two was the more effectual in the hour of trial? ———But extend your views to the eternal world; and compare the states of the Pharisee and the Publican, or of the martyred

[e] 1 Cor. iii. 11—13.
[f] Isai. l. 11.
[ff] Job xv. 31.
[g] Jer. xliv. 28

martyred Stephen and his self-applauding murderers; and then say, what principles are most salutary, and, what practice is most conducive to our true happiness. Away with all the systems then of man's device; and embrace with your whole hearts "the glorious Gospel of the blessed God."

2. The comfort of having the Lord for our God—

[Who can ever rob us of that? Who can take our God from us? or what can we want, if we have him for our friend? We may be spoiled of all else; but still we shall be rich. With his favour secured to us, and his love shed abroad in our hearts, we shall be truly happy; like Paul, "having nothing, and yet possessing all things." Seek ye then to have the Lord Jesus Christ abiding with you. Seek to have him for your sacrifice; him for your altar; "him for your Priest;" and you may then be as confident of the Divine favour as your hearts can wish. You may then safely adopt the language of Micah, and say, "I know that the Lord will do me good." God's favour is then made over to you by an everlasting covenant: it is confirmed to you by promise and by oath, "by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie." So that from henceforth you "may have strong consolation, if only you flee for refuge, to lay hold on the hope that is set before you[h]." Then you may look forward also to the day of judgment with assured confidence, that he who has witnessed the desires of your heart, will acknowledge you as his, and "claim you as his own when he shall make up his jewels[i]." Then shall it be seen, beyond all contradiction, who was right; the self-confident framer of a human system, or the humble follower of the Lamb: for "then shall all discern between the righteous and the wicked; between him who served God, and him who served him not[k]."]

[h] Heb. vi. 17—19. [i] Mal. iii. 16, 17. [k] ib. ver. 18.

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## CLXXXVIII.

### THE BENJAMITES' WICKEDNESS.

Judg. xxi. 25. *In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes.*

SUCH is the depravity of human nature, that man is always prone to depart from God; and departures once begun, extend rapidly through individuals, communities, and kingdoms: the removal of a few righteous persons, like the removal of a dam, soon opens a way for iniquity to inundate a whole

whole country. During the life of Joshua and his co-adjutors in the government, the Israelites retained a good measure of piety: but no sooner were they called to their eternal rest, than impiety began to deluge the land. The transactions recorded respecting the Danites in the 17th and 18th chapters, and of the Benjamites in the three last chapters, though placed after the history of the Judges, all took place whilst Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, was high-priest; and consequently, very soon after the death of Joshua, and before any Judge in Israel had been raised up[a]: and it is repeatedly noticed in all those chapters, that these overflowings of ungodliness were occasioned by the want of those salutary restraints, which a wise and righteous Governor would have imposed upon the people. This is particularly specified in our text; from whence we are very forcibly led to shew,

I. The obligations we owe to Civil Government—

Where there is no government, all manner of iniquities will prevail—

[This is most remarkably illustrated in the history before us. The idolatry of the Danites is ascribed to that[b]. The ease with which the inhabitants of Laish fell a prey to a small handful of invaders, was owing to the dissoluteness of its inhabitants, and a total want of Magistrates to enforce some salutary laws[c]. The whole account also of the Levite and his concubine, as connected with the horrid wickedness of the Benjamites, and the extensive miseries consequent upon it, are all referred to the same cause, a want of a Civil Governor, who should exercise a watchful care over the people, and impose such restraints as should keep them within the bounds of decency and order[d]. To appreciate these evils aright, the three last chapters should be attentively perused: the unheard of wickedness of the Benjamites; the determination of the whole tribe of Benjamin to protect the offenders; the civil war arising from it; the repeated defeats of the tribe of Judah; the ultimate destruction of the whole tribe of Benjamin, men, women, and children, with the exception of six hundred men who had fled from the field of battle; the demolition of all their cities; the destruction also of the whole population of Jabesh Gilead, except four hundred virgins, who were preserved in

[a] Ch. xx. 27, 28.
[b] Ch. xvii. 6. & xviii. 1.
[c] Ch. xviii. 7.
[d] Ch. xix. 1. with the text.

in order to prevent the utter extinction of the tribe of Benjamin; these and other miseries all arose out of this single circumstance, a want of a regular government sufficiently strong to prevent or punish the violations of the laws.

There is one circumstance in this history which seems unaccountable; namely, That when the eleven tribes were united against Benjamin, solely for the purpose of demanding justice against the perpetrators of that enormous wickedness, and when Judah led the battle by divine appointment, no less than forty thousand of that tribe should be slain by Benjamin in two battles, whilst the impious Benjamites suffered no loss at all. But God intended by this to punish the supineness of all the tribes, who had neglected to espouse his cause against the idolatrous Danites. They had united, as one man, when the interests of society demanded their interposition; but they had taken no steps to vindicate God's honour against the introduction of idolatry, though God had expressly required in his law their most determined interference in his behalf[a]. On this account God first made use of the Benjamites to punish them, and then delivered the Benjamites into their hands, that justice should be executed on them also.

But whatever was God's design in these desolating judgments, they must still be all referred to that cause which we have already noticed.

If any further illustration of the point be wanted, we need only behold the evils which are perpetrated even in the best regulated Governments, in defiance of the laws; and then we shall see what evils would obtain, if all the restraints of law and justice were withdrawn — — —]

## But a vigilant and energetic magistracy stems the torrent of iniquity—

[Where a good Government is, there are known and established laws, to which the highest, as well as the lowest in the State are amenable. Our persons, our property, yea even our reputation, are secured from injury; or, if any injure them, the law affords us suitable redress. If any sons of Belial will break through the restraints which the law has imposed upon them, no sooner are they convicted of the crime, than they pay the penalty with the loss of their liberties or lives. Hence every man feels himself secure; the weak fears not the invasion of his rights any more than the strong; but all sit, under their own vine and fig-tree, none making them afraid.

This security we are apt to overlook: but we can never in reality be too thankful for it. If we were to estimate our state according to truth, we should all consider ourselves like Daniel in the lions' den: the lions have not lost their nature; but they feel a restraint, which, though invisible, operates for our preservation:

[a] Deut. xiii. 12—16.

vation: if that were once withdrawn, we should then, like Daniel's persecutors, soon become a prey to the violent and oppressive.]

But the subject may justly lead us also to consider,

II. The obligations we owe to the Gospel of Christ—

The restraints of Civil Government are external only, and have respect chiefly to the welfare of society: they cannot reach to the thoughts or dispositions of the heart. Hence

Ungodly men do precisely what they please—

[They keep within the regulations of human laws, so far at least as to avoid a criminal prosecution; but they will indulge their lusts in ways which come not within the cognizance of the Civil Magistrate, and will live altogether "without God in the world." All indeed do not run to the same excess of riot; but all will equally "do what is right in their own eyes." All mark out a line for themselves: some give themselves a greater latitude; and some are circumscribed within narrower bounds; but all lay down to themselves certain rules, to which they annex the idea of propriety: and if a Minister of the Most High God stand forth to testify against their ways as evil, they will find an host to vindicate their cause, and to inflict the deadliest wounds also on those who dare to assault them in the name of God. The language of their hearts is, "Who is Lord over us?" In vain do we endeavour to convince them of their errors; they are determined to think themselves right: to be "right in their own eyes" is with them a perfect vindication of their conduct: they will not come "to the word and the testimony" of Scripture; that is a test to which they will not submit: and, if only they are free from gross and open sin, they despise the sword of the Spirit, and defy the sharpest arrows that are taken from his quiver.

What we here speak is as applicable to the most righteous among them, as to the most unrighteous. Solomon tells us that "there is a generation that is pure in their own eyes, who are not washed from their filthiness[f]." Their standard of duty, be it what it may, is of their own making: and they follow the laws of God no farther than will consist with the regulations which they have formed for themselves———]

But the Gospel produces in them a most blessed change—

[This *establishes a King in Israel:* it represents the Lord Jesus Christ as the Redeemer and the Lord of all; and erects his throne in the hearts of men———The Gospel *rectifies the views*

[f] Prov. xxx. 12.

*views also* of all that receive it. His law, and not our own vain conceits, becomes now the rule of judgment: the smallest deviation from that, whether by excess or defect, is regarded as evil, and nothing is approved any further than it agrees with that perfect standard———We may also add, It *regulates the conduct*. Those who receive the Gospel aright, instantly give themselves up to the Lord Jesus Christ, accounting his service to be perfect freedom, and desiring to live no longer to themselves, but "unto Him that died for them and rose again:"———Of course, we must not be understood to say that these effects are produced equally in all, or in any to their full extent. Men are still corrupt creatures, even the best of men; and consequently they will, like brands out of a fire, still bear the mark of the fire, though the flame be extinguished: but still they differ as widely from the unconverted world, as those who live under a well-regulated government do from the most licentious savages: they are thankful for the restraints under which they live; and are ready to die in defence of that King whom they venerate, and that law which they account it their highest privilege to obey. In civilized society, men are happy in being secured from external violence; but, under the Gospel, they are happy in being secured from the assaults of Satan, and from the corruptions of their own hearts.]

From this subject we would take occasion to recommend,

1. A self-diffident spirit—

[By nothing are the delusions of men more strengthened than by a confidence in their own wisdom and judgment. No reasons will weigh in opposition to the conceits of self-opinionated men; nor will an appeal to the Scriptures themselves be allowed to be of any force. Hence men perish in their errors, till it becomes too late to rectify them. How happy would it be if men would distrust their own judgment; and if, when they see how thousands of their neighbours err, they would admit the possibility of error in themselves! God has given us an unerring standard of truth: to that let us refer all our pre-conceived opinions; and remember, that, "if we walk not according to that rule, there is no light in us."]

2. A cautious judgment—

[Persons are apt to form their judgment on very inadequate grounds. Any one who should have seen the two defeats of Judah, would be ready to conclude, that the cause for which victory had decided, was the right: but we are not to judge from events: righteousness is not always triumphant in this world: it may be oppressed; and the supporters of it may be trodden under foot: but there is a time when God will vindicate his

his own cause, and evince the equity of all his dispensations. The unalterable word of God must be our only rule of judgment in every thing: if we suffer in following that, let us not doubt the goodness of our cause, but betake ourselves to fasting and prayer, and, above all, to that great sacrifice which was once offered for sin. Then, though suffering, we shall reap good to our souls; and, though vanquished now, we shall surely triumph at last.]

3. An unreserved submission to the king of Israel—

[This is true happiness: this once attained, no enemy can hurt us, no occurrence can disturb our peace. "I will keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on me, because he trusteth in me." O that we were all brought to surrender up ourselves unfeignedly to him! Whether we will submit to him or not, "God has set him as his King upon his holy hill of Zion;" and "He will reign, till all his enemies be put under his feet." "Kiss the Son then, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way:" and "let every imagination that is contrary to his will be cast down, and every thought be brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ."]

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## CLXXXIX.

### RUTH'S PIETY AND REWARD.

Ruth ii. 11, 12. *And Boaz answered and said unto her, It hath been fully shewed me, all that thou hast done unto thy mother-in-law since the death of thine husband; and how thou hast left thy father and thy mother and the land of thy nativity, and art come unto a people which thou knewest not heretofore. The Lord recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust.*

THE book of Ruth contains only the domestic occurrences of one poor family: and it may well excite our wonder, that such trifling incidents should occupy the pen of inspiration, when the affairs of kingdoms and nations are overlooked. But there is nothing trifling that relates to morals: and still less, that relates to the Messiah. Were there nothing contained here but an exhibition of filial piety, it would not be recorded in vain; because a very principal intent of the inspired volume is, to rectify,

in every relation of life, the dispositions and habits of mankind. But an attentive reader of this history will discover in it a fund of rich instruction. To assist you in this search, we shall set before you,

I. The general circumstances of the history—

Not having time to notice every thing, we shall confine ourselves to those parts which deserve our more especial attention. The famine that was in the land of Canaan "in the days of one of the Judges," the consequent departure of Elimelech with his wife and children into the land of Moab, the marriage of his two sons with Moabitish women, the death of Elimelech and of both his sons, the return of his wife Naomi to her native land, when she heard that God had restored plenty to it, these and other circumstances we pass over in silence, in order that we may enter more fully into the things which relate to Ruth.

Ruth was the wife of Mahlon, Naomi's son: and to her this history principally relates. Two things in particular are stated concerning her, and they are distinctly specified in the words of our text; namely,

1. Her piety—

[This was so conspicuous, that it was a matter of notoriety, and a theme of high commendation, at Bethlehem, almost as soon as she arrived there. On Naomi's adopting the resolution to return to her own country, Ruth, though a Moabitess, determined to accompany her: and, though Naomi stated faithfully to her the many inconveniences that would attend it, she would suffer nothing to divert her from her purpose. She had been instructed by Naomi in the knowledge of the only true God, and had seen in her the beauty and excellence of practical religion; and she determined to participate Naomi's lot, whatever it might be, and to give herself up a living sacrifice to Naomi's God. True it was, that in order to this she must relinquish all her own relations, and abandon all hopes of ever receiving benefits from them: but she had counted the cost, and deliberately preferred an adherence to Naomi and Naomi's God, before her country, her kindred, and all that the world could give her. The terms in which she expressed her resolution strongly marked the firmness of her purpose; "Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go;

go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God. Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the Lord do so to me, and more also, if aught but death part thee and me[a]."

Here is a pattern of true piety, and particularly as contrasted with Orpah, the relict of Naomi's other son. Orpah, as well as Ruth, was much attached to her mother-in-law Naomi; but she had not a supreme regard for the God of Israel: and therefore, when she saw what she must forego in order to accompany Naomi, she drew back, and returned to her own people and their gods. When the final decision was to be made, we are told, "They all lift up their voice and wept again: and Orpah *kissed* her mother-in-law; but Ruth *clave unto* her[b]." Could Orpah have adhered to Naomi without making any sacrifices, she would have done it; but if she must give up all her prospects in life in such a cause, she will not pay the price. She parts indeed with much regret; but still she parts; like the rich youth that turned his back on Christ, because he could not bring his mind to the terms which were required of him[c]. O that we may learn justly to appreciate the characters of Ruth and Orpah; and instead of drawing back, like Orpah, through the love of this world, may we follow rather the steps of pious Ruth, and "cleave unto the Lord with full purpose of heart." This is what our God requires of all; nor will our Saviour on any other terms acknowledge us as his disciples[d].]

2. Her reward—

[Though she knew not at all in what way God would requite her, yet she went forward, committing all her concerns to him, and "putting her trust under the shadow of his wings." Nor was she long before she experienced the tender mercies of her God. On her arrival at Bethlehem, she went into a field to glean some barley for the subsistence of herself, and of Naomi, whose infirmities rendered her unfit for so laborious an employment. Immediately, beyond all expectation, she was treated with great kindness by the reapers; and speedily afterwards by Boaz also, the owner of the field; who gave his servants a strict charge concerning her, and not only recommended her to glean in company with his maidens till the end of harvest, but authorized her to take a portion of their food, and bade the reapers to drop handfuls of corn for her, that she might reap the richer fruits of her industry. On her expressing her astonishment at all this unexpected kindness, she was informed by Boaz that it was a reward for the piety she had exercised towards her afflicted mother-in-law, and towards the Lord God of Israel.

Laden with an extraordinary quantity of corn, she went home at the evening to Naomi; who, finding on inquiry that this Benefactor

[a] Ch. i. 16, 17.
[b] ib. ver. 14.
[c] Matt. xix. 21, 22.
[d] Luke xiv. 26, 27, 33.

factor was Boaz, a near relation of her own, encouraged her to follow the advice he had given her, and to glean in no other fields but his. Moreover, when Naomi found that this kindness of Boaz continued to the end of harvest, she began to think that God might incline the heart of Boaz to execute the office which belonged to the person who was nearest of kin to one who had died childless, namely, "to marry the widow, and to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance." In the hope of this, she advised Ruth to adopt a measure, which certainly to us appears exceeding strange, and which cannot be satisfactorily accounted for, except we suppose Naomi to have been actuated by a divine impulse, or at least by a firm reliance on God, whose glory, in this matter, she principally consulted. The expedient, dangerous as it was, succeeded: and Boaz agreed, that if another person who was nearer of kin to Ruth than himself should decline the office, he would instantly take it upon himself. The very next morning Boaz made the proposal publickly to the man who had a prior right; and then, on his declining to fulfil his duty, openly avowed his determination to fulfil it himself; and called the elders of the city to attest his redemption of her inheritance, and his espousal of her for his lawful wife. Thus wonderfully did God reward her for all her piety. Still further, though she had lived several years with her husband, and had borne no child, yet now it pleased God to confer on her that which was the great desire of her soul, and to make her a mother in Israel: yea, so greatly did God honour her, that David, the greatest of all the kings of Israel, sprang from her, as the grandson of her child; and the Lord Jesus Christ himself, the Saviour of the world, was lineally descended from her.

How richly was now that prayer of Boaz answered to her, "The Lord recompense thy work, and a full reward be given to thee of the Lord God of Israel!"]

Such being the principal circumstances of the history, we proceed to notice,

II. The light which it reflects on subjects of the greatest moment—

And here a flood of light breaks in upon us. Truly the history is replete with instruction: independent of the *moral* duties which it inculcates, such as those of parental care and filial love, or the *religious* duties, such as affiance in God and devotion to his service, it reflects a light on,

1. The ways of Providence—

[Little do persons think, when brought into great affliction, what good may be derived from it, or what are the ultimate

designs of God in it. When Naomi first came to Bethlehem, and was recognized by her old acquaintance, she said to them, "Call me not Naomi, but Marah," that is, not *Pleasant*, but *Bitter*[e]; but within a few weeks she was congratulated as the happiest of women[f]: so completely was that Scripture verified in her, "He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth the needy out of the dunghill; that he may set him with princes, even with the princes of his people. He maketh the barren woman to keep house, to be a joyful mother of children[g]." The ways by which her exaltation was effected, appeared fortuitous; but they were all ordered by the Lord, who foresaw the end from the beginning. It is said in the history, that "Ruth's *hap* was to light on a part of the field belonging to Boaz." Thus, as far as it was *her act*, it was casual and undesigned; but as a link in God's chain, it was entirely ordered of the Lord. The same must be observed in reference to every other part of the history: the minutest event in it, as in that of Joseph, was under the immediate controul of God, who made use of the most contingent means to accomplish his own eternal purpose. Let not any then, however reduced, conclude that their case is desperate, or that God has brought them into such a state *for evil:* for, as the bondage and imprisonment of Joseph were steps to his highest exaltation, so may our heaviest afflictions be the appointed means of bringing us to the most exalted good. "God's ways are in the great deep, and his footsteps are not known:" and he not unfrequently "makes the depths of the sea a way for his ransomed to pass over[h]."]

2. The wonders of Redemption—

[Two things were enjoined by the law of Moses for the express purpose of shadowing forth the redemption of the world; the one was, that the nearest of kin should have a right to redeem an inheritance which his relation had mortgaged[i]; and the other was, that the brother of a person who died childless should marry his widow, in order to raise up seed to the departed person, and to prevent his name from perishing in Israel[k]. These prefigured the Lord Jesus Christ as our kinsman, "bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh," redeeming us by his own precious blood; and uniting himself to us, that we might bring forth fruit unto God[l]. Now both of these things were done in the history before us: Boaz, as the kinsman of Ruth, purchased her to be his wife; and also redeemed her inheritance, that she, together with himself, might have the enjoyment of it. When he called the elders to be witnesses of the transaction, these were his own words; "Ye are witnesses this day, that *I have bought* all that was Elimelech's,

[e] Ch. i. 20.
[f] Ch. iv. 14, 15.
[g] Ps. cxiii. 7—9.
[h] Isai. li. 10.
[i] Lev. xxv. 25.
[k] Deut. xxv. 5—10.
[l] Rom. vii. 4.

Elimelech's, and all that was Chilion's and Mahlon's, of the hand of Naomi: moreover, Ruth, the Moabitess, the wife of Mahlon, *have I purchased* to be my wife[m]." Both the one and the other he obtained by purchase, being entitled so to do by the special ties of consanguinity: and we are expressly told, that the Lord Jesus Christ assumed our nature for that very purpose, that, "being made of a woman, and under the law, he might redeem them that were under the law[n]." The words of the Apostle are, "Forasmuch as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their life-time subject to bondage[o]." How interesting then does this portion of the inspired records become, when we behold what a mystery is contained in it!]

3. The call of the Gentiles into the Church of Christ—

[In common cases it was unlawful for an Israelite to marry one of the daughters of Moab: but Ruth was become a proselyte to the Jewish religion, and was therefore entitled to all the privileges of a child of Abraham. Still as a Moabitess, taken into that line from whence the Messiah was to spring, and actually made an instrument of continuing the succession whereby he was brought into the world, she was a witness for God to the Gentile world that he had not utterly forsaken them; but that they in due time should be incorporated with his chosen people, and become partakers of his salvation. Previous to this period, she was barren; but now she bore a son, through whom thousands and myriads were born to God; and in being the lineal ancestor of Christ, she was instrumental to the happiness of all that shall be saved by him, even of us Gentiles, as well as of those that were of Jewish descent. To her therefore we may eminently apply those words of the Prophet, "Sing, O barren, thou that didst not bear! break forth into singing, and cry aloud, thou that didst not travail with child! for more are the children of the desolate, than the children of the married wife, saith the Lord[p]." Let none then apprehend that they are so far off, but that they may yet be brought nigh by the blood of Jesus, and "sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of God."]

4. The procedure of God in the day of judgment—

[Rewards do not always accompany virtue in this world, because God has appointed a day wherein he will judge the world in righteousness, and reward every one according to his works. But there are some instances wherein God appears for his

[m] Ch. iv. 9, 10.
[n] Gal. iv. 4, 5.
[o] Heb. ii. 14, 15.
[p] Isai. liv. 1.

his people now, in order that he may give a specimen, as it were, of what he will do hereafter: and such an instance is exhibited in the history before us: Ruth's love to Naomi, and her confidence in the God of Israel, were richly recompensed. And who shall ever fail of recompence, that devotes himself unfeignedly to the God of Israel, and surrenders for him all his worldly prospects and comforts? We must indeed bear in mind the difference between the conduct of Orpah and of Ruth: it is not by a profession of love, but by the actual manifestation of it, that we must approve ourselves to God: we must not be contented with saluting his people, but must adhere to them, deliberately braving all difficulties and trials, and determinately adhering to his sacred cause. Let us only act in this manner; and the whole universe, like the Bethlehemites on that occasion, shall soon witness our reward[q].]

[q] Matt. xix. 29. with Ps. xlv. 10.

## CXC.

### HANNAH'S SONG OF THANGSGIVING.

1 Sam. ii. 1—10. *And Hannah prayed, and said, My heart rejoiceth in the Lord; mine horn is exalted in the Lord; my mouth is enlarged over mine enemies; because I rejoice in thy salvation. There is none holy as the Lord: for there is none besides thee; neither is there any rock like our God. Talk no more so exceeding proudly; let not arrogancy come out of your mouth: for the Lord is a God of knowledge; and by him actions are weighed. The bows of the mighty men are broken, and they that stumbled are girded with strength. They that were full have hired out themselves for bread; and they that were hungry ceased; so that the barren hath borne seven; and she that hath many children hath waxed feeble. The Lord killeth, and maketh alive; he bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up. The Lord maketh poor, and maketh rich; he bringeth low, and lifteth up. He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory: for the pillars of the earth are the Lord's, and he hath set the world upon them. He will keep the feet of his saints, and the wicked shall be silent in darkness; for by strength shall no man prevail. The adversaries of the Lord shall be broken to pieces; out of heaven shall he thunder upon them: the Lord shall judge the ends of the earth; and he shall give strength unto his King, and exalt the horn of his Anointed.*

THE

THE return which mankind in general make to God for his mercies is, to idolize the gift, and forget the Giver. Directly opposite to this is the conduct of those who are truly pious: they value the gift only in proportion to its real worth, and rise in heavenly contemplations to the Donor himself; thus making the creature an occasion of exalting and magnifying the Creator. We observe this particularly in the history of Hannah, whose devout acknowledgments we have just recited. She had been greatly afflicted on account of her not bearing any child to her husband Elkanah, whilst Peninnah, who was his other wife, had borne several. Her grief was daily augmented by the unkind behaviour of Peninnah; nor could all the kindness and love that she experienced from her husband, remove it. She carried her complaints therefore to the Lord, who alone was able to relieve them: unto him she vowed, that if he would grant her a son, she would dedicate him to the service of the sanctuary, and that he should be a Nazarite from the womb. Having obtained her request from God, she now came to perform her vow: as soon as the child could with any propriety be separated from her, it is thought at three or four years old, she took him with her to the tabernacle at Shiloh, and there, for the whole remainder of his days, "lent him to the Lord." At the time of surrendering him up, she burst forth in this song of praise and thanksgiving, in which she takes occasion, from the mercy vouchsafed to her, to adore the goodness of God as manifested towards the whole creation. She mentions,

I. The perfections of his nature—

Unless we are fully aware of the desire which the Jewish women felt to have the Messiah spring from them, we shall not be able to account for the extreme grief occasioned by barrenness, or for the exultation arising from the birth of a child. But to all the common grounds of joy which Hannah had in the birth of Samuel, that of her deliverance from the

the taunts and insults of her rival was a great addition: and to that she had especial respect in the opening of this song——— But, after this slight mention of her own particular case, she proceeds to celebrate,

1. The power and holiness of God—

[God does not always interpose in this world to display his hatred of sin, or to vindicate the oppressed; because there is a day coming, when he will rectify all the present inequalities of his moral government: but he does not leave himself altogether without witness, that he is a righteous Governor, and a powerful Avenger. His effectual interposition on this occasion was, in Hannah's eyes, a decisive proof, yea and a glorious exhibition too, of his holiness and power; and gave her an assurance, that as these perfections were essential to his nature, and unbounded in their extent, so they should ever be called forth into activity in behalf of all who should trust in him———]

2. His wisdom and equity—

[Great was her consolation, that whilst she was judged uncharitably by her fellow-creatures, she had One to whom she could commit her cause; One who was privy to every thought of her heart, and would put a just construction upon the whole of her conduct: and, in the contemplation of this truth, she exulted over those who had so proudly and so arrogantly condemned her. And truly this is one of the richest sources of consolation that any person can have, when suffering under misrepresentations or calumnies of whatever kind: yea, it is quite sufficient to tranquillize the mind, and to raise it above all those feelings which oppression is calculated to produce[a]———]

II. The dispensations of his providence—

[Here the pious Hannah extends her views from herself to the world at large; and declares, that the change thus produced in her state, is illustrative of what is done by God throughout the whole creation. In *the events of war* — in *the enjoyment of plenty* — in *the increase of families* — in *the continuance of life* — in *the possession of wealth* — and in *advancement to honour* — who does not see that the greatest changes take place, even when least expected[b]? and who therefore must not be convinced of the folly of indulging either presumptuous confidence, on the one hand, or desponding fears, on the other? None can say, "I am so strong, I shall never be moved;" nor ought any one to say, "There is hope:" the afflicted should "weep, as though they wept not;" and the prosperous "rejoice, as though they rejoiced not;" each being aware that their condition

[a] 1 Cor. iv. 3—5. [b] ver. 4—8.

dition may soon be altered, and shall be, if God see it on the whole conducive to their good.]

III. The purposes of his grace—

From a view of temporal concerns, she rises to those which are spiritual and eternal: indeed here her words are evidently prophetic, and relate,

1. To the Church—

[She had found to her joy what care God takes of his people: and she confidently declared, that that care should be extended to all his saints, even to the end of time. Their adversaries might lay snares for their feet; but HE would "keep their feet;" he would "keep them from falling, and present them faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy[c]"——— On the other hand, his adversaries should assuredly be confounded by him: however they might vindicate themselves now, they should soon "be silent in darkness;" and though now they might defy him, as it were, to his face, he would thunder upon them out of heaven, and utterly, yea eternally, destroy them ———]

2. To the Church's King, the Messiah himself—

[As yet there had been no king in Israel; nor was there for fifty years afterwards: and therefore it is reasonable to think that she spake of Him, whose throne was in due time to be erected in the hearts of men, even the Lord Jesus Christ. This further appears from her characterizing him by the very name Messiah, a name never before assigned to the King of Israel, but henceforth intended to designate him before all others; the Messiah, the Anointed, and the Christ, being all terms of precisely the same import. That she spake of *Him*, yet further appears by the marked resemblance between this song, and that which the blessed Virgin poured forth at the prospect of the Saviour's birth[d]. His triumph then she firmly predicts; and declares that his kingdom shall be extended even to "the ends of the earth." Many efforts will be made to prevent its establishment in the world; but none shall prevail: "his horn shall be exalted," and all his enemies shall perish.

It may be asked, What had this to do with the particular occasion of Hannah's thanksgiving? I answer, It is this very thing which constitutes in a very great degree the beauty of this song, and that marks the effects of ardent piety upon the soul: a single mercy, like a stream, leads the soul up to the Fountain-head: and it is then only improved aright, when we take occasion from it to contemplate the fulness that is treasured up there, and that is diffusing all possible blessings, temporal and spiritual, throughout

[c] Jude 24 [d] Luke i. 46—55.

throughout the world: and, inasmuch as the universal reign of Christ is that which will bring most glory to God and most good to men, it ought ever to be uppermost in our minds; and every mercy we enjoy should lead us ultimately to the contemplation of it.]

We may LEARN then from hence,

1. The benefit of prayer—

[See how successful she was, though she uttered no words, but only importuned God in her heart[e]! And what will God refuse to those who seek him in sincerity and truth? — — — The Saviour's promise to us all is this, "Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, I will do it;" "Ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you."

Let all the sons and daughters of affliction bear this in mind. Here is a sure remedy for all their griefs, and an infallible supply for all their wants[f].]

2. The blessedness of true religion—

[Exceeding heavy were Hannah's trials[g]: and they were not a little aggravated by the uncharitable surmises of Eli himself[h]. But into what holy joy were they turned at last! Thus, when true religion occupies the soul, will even the most afflictive dispensations be overruled for good: our night of sorrow may appear long; but the morning of joy shall soon arise: our seed-time of tears shall be followed with a blessed harvest. Only let us delight in heavenly contemplations, and every perfection of God's nature, every dispensation of his providence, and every purpose of his grace, shall swell, as it were, our tide of joy, till it becomes "unspeakable and glorified."]

[e] 1 Sam. i. 10, 12, 13.
[f] Ps. xl. 1—3.
[g] 1 Sam. i. 6, 7.
[h] ib. ver. 13—16.

## CXCI.

### ELI'S UNFAITHFULNESS REPROVED.

1 Sam. ii. 30. *Them that honour me, I will honour; and they that despise me, shall be lightly esteemed.*

HOWEVER the promises of God may be expressed, they are never so to be understood, as if they should be fulfilled to us whilst we are in a state of wilful sin: there is always in them an implied condition, that we depart from iniquity, and endeavour faithfully to serve the Lord. To Aaron a promise

a promise was made, that the priesthood should be continued in his family, and in that of Eleazar his son: yet for some wickedness of his descendants it was transferred from the family of Eleazar, his eldest son, to that of his younger son, Ithamar, from whom Eli was descended. Again the promise was made, that it should be continued in the line of Eli: but, for a similar reason, it was afterwards taken from Abiathar, his descendant, and given to Zadoc, who was of the elder branch. That the promises were to be understood with such limitations, God himself declares in this address to Eli; wherein he tells Eli, that he had rescinded the promise made to him, and determined to act towards him on the broad basis of equity, precisely as he would towards all mankind: "I said indeed that thy house, and the house of thy father, should walk before me for ever: but now the Lord saith, Be it far from me; for them that honour me, I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed."

Here we may see,

I. What conduct God requires of us—

This will be best learned from a review of the context. Eli being far advanced in age, his sons performed the priestly office in his stead. But they abused their power to such a degree as to "make the offerings of the Lord to be abhorred." Eli heard of their proceedings, and reproved them for their wickedness: but he neglected to exert that authority with which God had invested him; and manifested more regard for the feelings of his sons, than he did for the honour of his God. This was Eli's fault, and the occasion of God's heavy displeasure against him. From hence then we see what God requires of us: he expects us,

1. To have a supreme regard for his glory—

[The honour of God ought to be dear to every one of us: for though we cannot augment or diminish his essential glory, we may greatly affect the regards of men towards him, and be an occasion of his being either honoured or blasphemed by multitudes around us. In truth, there is not any thing we do, but has consi-

considerable influence of this kind. How careful then should we be, and how watchful, not to do any thing which may lower him him in the esteem of men! The thought that should be ever uppermost in our minds, is this; "What aspect will such or such conduct have upon religion; and what effect will it produce in advancing or retarding its influence in the world?———]

2. To promote it to the utmost of our power—

[To exemplify religion in our own conduct must be our first labour, and to shew all possible respect to every thing that relates to God. His word, his sabbath, his name, his Gospel, his cause and interest in the world, must be exceeding high in our estimation. But we must not content ourselves with honouring God in our own persons; we must exert all our influence that he may be honoured by all around us. Some are invested with Magisterial power; and they must use it for God, and not bear the sword in vain. To others is committed the Ministry of the Gospel: and they must boldly reprove sin of every kind, and commend themselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. To others is parental authority entrusted: and they must not content themselves with gently rebuking the wickedness of their children, but must exert themselves to the uttermost to restrain it. Here was Eli's defect. He did well to begin with mild reproof: but he should have proceeded to severer measures, when he saw that they were not to be reclaimed by gentler means. In a word, we should be so intent on advancing the honour of God in the world, as to esteem nothing too much to do, nor any thing too great to suffer, for the attainment of our object: relations, interests, or life itself, should be of no account with us in comparison of this[a].]

Such being the conduct which God requires, let us consider,

II. In what light he will view it—

He will account himself "honoured" by our observance of it—

[Often does he speak to us to this effect: and in what sense we must understand the expression, has been before explained. Though "our goodness cannot extend to him," or profit "him," if he esteem himself glorified by it, it is quite sufficient for us: nor can we have any greater stimulus to exertion than such a consideration as this. To form a just estimate of it, let us only reflect on the zeal which is manifested by all the hosts of heaven to honour God: how do they all vie with each other in their songs of praise! And if an opportunity were afforded them to advance his

[a] Luke xiv. 26. with that expression in the verse before the text, "Thou honourest thy sons above me."

his honour by any offices on earth, how readily would they leave their blest abodes, and fly hither to execute his high commands! They are represented as "doing his commandments, and hearkening to the voice of his word," to obey the first intimation of his will. Such is the zeal that should animate us; and God will assuredly consider himself as glorified by it: indeed he is glorified, inasmuch as our obedience proclaims to all around us, that he is, in our estimation at least, worthy of all the love that we can manifest, and of all the service that we can render him.]

But where such conduct is wanting, God accounts himself treated with contempt—

[Is there no medium between an honouring of God and a despising of him? I answer, No: if he be not honoured, something else is honoured above him, and the creature is set above the Most High God. It is said of Eli, that he "honoured his sons above God:" and this was considered by God as an instance of direct and absolute contempt. The same is true respecting every act of disobedience, and every neglect of duty; which necessarily implies an attention to our own ease, interest, or pleasure, in preference to the will of God. What a contempt of the Divine Majesty does it argue, when we resist his will! What a contempt of his love and mercy, when we neglect his salvation! What a contempt of his justice, his holiness, and his truth, when we entertain the idea that such conduct can pass with impunity! This is the very construction that God himself puts upon such conduct: "Wherefore doth the wicked *contemn* God, while he doth say in his heart, Thou God wilt not require it!"

If then *we*, poor, ignorant, guilty creatures, feel so keenly when we are treated with contempt, let us consider how indignantly the Most High God will resent such conduct at our hands.]

He himself has told us,

II. What notice he will take of it—

He will honour his faithful and obedient servants—

[This he has promised[b]: and he will perform it. Men may treat them as if they were "the filth of the earth and the offscouring of all things;" (though they cannot help reverencing them in their hearts[c]:) but God will honour them with the most distinguished tokens of his love. He "will give them a name better than of sons and of daughters," and will enrich them with the inestimable blessings of grace and peace. *Through their* whole *lives* he will admit them to the nearest fellowship with himself: and what will he not do for them *in the hour of death?* — — — Yet all this falls infinitely short of the glory he will confer upon them *in the future world.* Read what testimonies

[b] John xii. 26. [c] Mark vi. 20.

monies of his approbation he will give them before the assembled universe, and with what honours he will invest them at his own right hand[d]: verily they shall never have reason to complain that their fidelity to God has not been adequately rewarded.]

But those who have despised him shall be despised by him—

[Though they may be exalted among men, God will hold them in the utmost contempt. He will not vouchsafe to them so much as one kind look: but, on the contrary, in the hour of their greatest extremity, "he will laugh at their calamity, and mock when their fear cometh." No consolations will he administer to them in a dying hour; but will rather hide his face from them, and shut his ear at the voice of their cry. And when they stand at his judgment-seat, he will bid them "depart accursed into everlasting fire," regarding them no more than the chaff that is cast into the oven ——— They will then indeed "be lightly esteemed;" for they will "awake to shame and everlasting contempt."]

Here then we may SEE,

1. What estimate we should form of lukewarm religion—

[That religion is most pleasing to men, which is regulated by the opinions of the world: but that alone is acceptable with God, which is agreeable to the standard of his revealed will. He requires our whole hearts; and looks with utter abhorrence upon the lukewarmness of a Laodicean state[e] ——— Let us then not be contented with serving God in our closets; but let us confess him in the world: and let us not only serve him ourselves, but use all our influence to bring others also to a submission to his will. Yea, if all others should determinately reject his yoke, let us say, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."]

2. What alone we are to regard as the great object of our desire—

["The honour that cometh of man" should be no farther of any account with us, than it may augment our influence in serving God. It is the honour which cometh of God that alone deserves our concern. To have the witness of his Spirit and the testimony of our own conscience that we are pleasing God, is worthy of our most diligent pursuit. That will comfort us, when all other sources of consolation are cut off. Moreover, the approbation of God will continue, millions of ages after that the breath of man's applause has vanished away. Let us then *act to* God, and *live for* God, and endeavour so to walk with him, that we may enjoy the light of his countenance: for "in his favour is life, and his loving-kindness is better than life itself."]

[d] Matt. xxv. 34. Mal. iii. 17. [e] Rev. iii. 15, 16.

## CXCII.

### ELI'S SUBMISSION TO THE DIVINE REBUKES.

1 Sam. iii. 18. *And Samuel told him every whit, and hid nothing from him. And he said, It is the Lord: let him do what seemeth him good.*

IT is of the nature of sin to harden the heart, and to prevent the declarations of God from having their due influence on the mind[a]. It operates in this manner, wherever it is found: the righteous, no less than the wicked, experience the same effects, in proportion as it gains an ascendant over them. Eli had neglected to exert that authority, which, as God's high-priest, and as a parent, he ought to have exercised over his abandoned sons: and God sent a prophet to him, "a man of God," to reprove him, and to warn him of the judgments which his sin would bring both on himself and his posterity[b]. But this message seems to have produced no good effect. God therefore used another method of awakening his conscience: he revealed himself to Samuel by an audible voice, and renewed to him the declarations, that had been before made in vain. The voice was new to Samuel; and, taking it for Eli's voice, he repeatedly attended on the aged priest: but when, according to the direction of Eli, he had requested the further communication of God's will, he received from God the communication he desired. It does not appear that he would of himself have imparted to Eli the information he had received: but when adjured to it by Eli himself, he could not refrain.

The points for our present consideration are,

I. The fidelity of Samuel—

[The tidings were of a most dreadful nature: and to deliver them must have been a distressing office to Samuel. But Samuel was not elated by the revelation that had been made to him; nor was he hasty to denounce the judgments which he was commissioned to declare[c]; yet on the other hand, when he was solemnly called upon to disclose the whole, he would not dissemble, nor conceal any thing; but related to Eli every minute particular.

In

[a] Heb. iii. 13. [b] Ch. ii. 27—35. [c] Jer. xvii. 16.

In this we have an excellent model for God's servants in every age. They should deliver only what they themselves have received from God: nor, in delivering that, should they delight to denounce the judgments of God, or exult over those whom they are constrained to condemn: yet they should, with becoming fidelity, "declare the whole counsel of God:" they should "keep back nothing that can be profitable" to those to whom they are sent; but should "commend themselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God."

The consciousness of their own youth or weakness should not keep them from discharging their duty aright: they should declare the whole truth to all, whether old or young, professors or profane: "Having received God's word, they must speak his word faithfully[d]."]

Whilst we approve of the fidelity of Samuel, we must also of necessity admire,

II. The resignation of Eli—

[If the tidings were painful to Samuel to deliver, much more must they be so to Eli to hear: even to persons far less interested than he, they were sufficient to make "their ears to tingle." Yet Eli did not set himself against them, though delivered by a child: on the contrary, he submitted to the divine decree with humble resignation. He knew that God was too wise to err, and too good to inflict punishment without a cause. He knew also that he himself had sinned against the Lord, and well deserved the judgments that had been denounced against him. Hence the language of his heart was, "I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against him[e]."

This shews how we should receive all the denunciations of God's wrath against sin. We should not "puff at them," or harden ourselves against them, or think unkindly of those who set them before us; we should not with Pharisaic pride say, "In so saying thou reproachest us:" but whatever God says in his word, by whomsoever it may be delivered, we should "receive it, not as the word of man, but as the word of God," precisely as much as if it had been spoken to us by an audible voice from heaven. Eternal judgments indeed we may deprecate, yea and ought to deprecate, with all our might: and even temporal calamities we may deprecate *in submission to God:* we may intreat him to remove the bitter cup, as fervently as we will, provided we add, "Nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done:" but we must acknowledge the justice of God even in his severest judgments, and be contented that our temporal happiness should be destroyed, if only "our spirits may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus[f]."]

From

[d] Jer. xxiii. 28. [e] Mic. vii. 9. [f] 1 Cor. v. 5.

From this subject we may further LEARN,

1. The importance of exerting our influence for God—

[Eli had neglected to punish his sons for their great impieties: he had reproved them indeed; but when he found the inefficiency of lenient reproofs, he had neglected to adopt severer measures. This was the sin which excited God's displeasure against him, and occasioned the utter ruin of his whole family. How strongly does this apply to every individual amongst us! and how urgently does it call upon us to exert our influence, whatever it may be, for God! Let us not say, "Am I my brother's keeper?" If others are bold in the service of the devil, we should be bold in the service of our God: "we must in any wise reprove our brother, and not suffer sin upon him." Our influence is as much a talent as our time, or money, or any thing else; and we ought to use it for God. We should not be contented to go to heaven alone, but should endeavour to carry all we can along with us.]

2. The comfort of being interested in the Gospel of Christ—

[There were many sins for which the Mosaic dispensation provided no sacrifice: and God himself warned Eli, that "the iniquity of his house should never be purged by sacrifice or offering, to the end of time." But no such declaration is made to us under the Gospel: there is not a word in all the Bible that even hints at the insufficiency of Christ's sacrifice to atone for the greatest guilt, or the doubtfulness of any person's acceptance, provided he plead that sacrifice as the ground of his hopes. We are told indeed, that, "if a man sin wilfully, (*in rejecting that sacrifice*) after he has received the knowledge of the truth, there remains *no other sacrifice*, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation[g]:" but to those who penitently trust in that sacrifice there is no ground of despondency. Whatever then our sins may have been, let us remember, that the death of Christ was "a propitiation for the sins of the whole world;" that "his blood is able to cleanse us from all sin;" and that "though our sins be red as crimson, they shall through him be made white as snow." Let this comfort us under every desponding apprehension; and whilst, with Eli, we commit the entire disposal of all events into the hands of a righteous God, let us cast ourselves with confidence on his promised mercy, and "hold fast the rejoicing of our hope firm unto the end."]

[g] Heb. x. 26.

## CXCIII.

### ELI'S ANXIETY FOR THE ARK OF GOD.

1 Sam. iv. 13. *Lo, Eli sat upon a seat by the way-side, watching: for his heart trembled for the ark of God.*

THE word of God, to whatever it relate, shall certainly in due time be accomplished: it may indeed, like the seed under the clods, appear to have been lost: but as soon as the appointed season arrives, we shall be made to see, that not a jot or tittle of God's word can ever fail. It had some years before been announced to Eli, that God would bring such judgments upon his house as should make "the ears of every one that heard of them to tingle." Now the time for the execution of the threatening drew nigh; and the manner in which it was executed is set before us. The Philistines had gained a victory over Israel, and had slain about four thousand men. The elders of Israel, astonished at such an event, devised an expedient for securing, as they hoped, a successful issue to the contest. They sent to Shiloh for the ark of God; which accordingly was brought by Hophni and Phinehas into the camp. Eli, at the advanced age of ninety-eight, being informed of the measure that had been adopted, anticipated in his mind the evils that were at hand; and full of anxiety, "sat by the way-side, watching; for his heart trembled for the ark of God."

We propose to consider,

I. The grounds of his anxiety—

Eli did not doubt whether God *was able* to protect his ark; but he had just grounds to doubt whether he *would* protect it—

[He knew the wicked state of the people at large, and of his sons in particular — — — He knew that the measure which had been adopted, had not been commanded or authorized by God — — — He knew that if the ark should be taken, the loss would be incalculable — — — He knew that in the event of such a misfortune, the Philistines would profanely exult over the God of Israel — — —]

And if on these grounds he trembled for the ark,

is

is there not reason to tremble for the cause of God in many parts of the Christian world?

[Of the wickedness of merely nominal Christians it is almost superfluous to speak. Let us turn our attention rather to those whose office it is to bear the ark and to minister before it; how many of them, alas! walk unworthy of their high calling! Or let us look to those who profess to regard the ark of God, and to expect salvation from a Covenant God in Christ: do we not behold amongst them many by whom God is habitually and grievously dishonoured? Are there not many too, who, under a sense of their guilt and danger, devise expedients which were never sanctioned by the Lord, and resort to them for salvation, in an utter neglect of those means which have been revealed by God? What have all such persons reason to expect, but that God, who has long since departed from the Churches of Asia, and from innumerable other Churches which once enjoyed the light of his Gospel, should "remove his candlestick" from them? And what if such a judgment should be inflicted upon us? How would those who hate the light exult, and the daughters of the uncircumcised triumph! Truly, if we viewed the state of the Christian world aright, there is scarcely a people for whom we have not cause to tremble, lest they should lose the privileges which they are so backward to improve, and be delivered up into the hands of their spiritual enemies. And "woe unto them when God departs from them[a]!"]

Commendable as the anxiety of Eli was, we cannot be surprised at,

II. The issue of it—

[The Israelites were defeated: no less than thirty thousand of them perished: the sons of Eli, the priests who bore the ark, were slain: and the ark itself was taken. The awful tidings soon reached the ears of Eli. He heard of Israel's defeat, and bowed with meek submission; as he did also when he was informed of the death of both his sons: but when he was told that the ark of God was taken, he fainted, he fell, he died.

Now in this death he may appear to have resembled the wicked Israelites: but there was in truth a great difference between them. His death indeed was in part judicial, and so far may be compared with theirs: but theirs was accompanied with manifest tokens of the Divine displeasure; and we have reason to fear that not they only, but Hophni and Phinehas also, were cut off in their sins. But Eli shewed his supreme regard for God; and in some sense died a martyr to his love to God. The wife of Phinehas

[a] Hos. ix. 12. with Josh. vii. 6—9. & Neh. i. 3, 4.

Phinehas also evinced the same piety. She was so affected with the tidings, that her pangs of travail were prematurely hastened; and, when her attendants strove to comfort her with the information that she had borne a son, she no further noticed it than to give him the name of I-chabod, which means *inglorious;* assigning as the reason for it, that "the glory was departed from Israel, and the ark of God was taken[b]." Thus did she, and Eli, manifest, that a concern for the honour of God was deeply rooted in their minds, more deeply than any other consideration, whether of public interest or of the ties of consanguinity.

We congratulate then this aged Priest on the issue of his anxiety: and we rejoice, that, when his errors in life had subjected him to the Divine displeasure, he shewed in his death that he had obtained mercy of the Lord. Had we not been informed of this closing scene, we might have doubted how far the judgments of God might come upon him in the eternal world: but, with this knowledge of his latter end, we feel no doubt of his acceptance with God, and his exaltation to the realms of bliss.]

This whole history is very instructive: it teaches us,

1. The inefficacy of ordinances—

[As the Israelites idolized the ark, and looked to it as a Saviour in the place of God, so do many look to the ordinances of religion, (as though there were in them a power to save,) instead of looking through them to the God of ordinances. But, though Paul should plant or Apollos water, it is God alone that can give the increase: and if we put the word, or Ministers, or sacraments, or any thing else in the place of God, we shall find them to be a lamp without oil, and "a fountain sealed."]

2. The danger of presumption—

[The Israelites hoped for the Divine protection, though they humbled not themselves for their iniquities, nor even in earnest implored his help; yea, they shouted for joy as though a victory were already gained. But it is in vain to indulge such an hope as this. If we turn not from our sins, it is not possible but that we must be overtaken by the Divine judgments. For the truth of this, God himself refers us to the history before us: "Go," says he, "and learn what I did to Shiloh, for the wickedness thereof[c]."]

3. The necessity of walking in the fear of God—

[We know not how soon, or how suddenly, death may come upon us. Even if our lives be prolonged to an advanced age, we may yet be taken off without a moment's warning. How desirable

[b] ver. 19—22.

[c] Compare Ps. lxxviii. 58—64. with Jer. vii. 12.

sirable then is it that all, and especially those who are drawing nigh to the time of child-birth, should stand ready for death and judgment! It is not necessary, nor indeed desirable, that we should be living under a servile dread of death; but we should be "working out our salvation with *fear and trembling*." We should be "trembling for the ark of God;" longing to hear of the victories of Christ in the world, and dreading to hear of the triumphs of his enemies. We should particularly "watch," to see the progress of his grace in our own souls, and fear lest by any means he should be dishonoured through us. If that be our frame of mind, we shall be accepted of God both in life and death: for the declaration of God himself is this, "Blessed is the man that feareth always."]

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## CXCIV.

### THE ARK RETURNED TO BETH-SHEMESH.

1 Sam. vi. 20. *And the men of Beth-shemesh said, Who is able to stand before this holy Lord God?*

TILL we come to behold some extraordinary interposition of the Deity, we have in general a very slight sense of his majesty and greatness: but when we see any remarkable display of his power, we are apt to forget all his other perfections, and to think of him with insupportable terror. We have a striking instance of this in the Israelites, when they saw God's decision of their controversy with Aaron on the subject of the priesthood: "They said, Behold, we die, we perish, we all perish: whosoever cometh any thing near unto the tabernacle of the Lord shall die: shall we be consumed with dying[a]?" Thus, in the passage before us, the men of Beth-shemesh, who had just before manifested so little respect for the Lord as to treat his ark with impious irreverence, no sooner felt the tokens of his displeasure than they exclaimed, "Who is able to stand before this holy Lord God?"

We propose to consider,

I. The grounds and occasions of this question—

To understand it aright, we must consult the whole of this and of the preceding chapter.

God

[a] Numb. xvii. 12, 13.

God had prevailed over the idolatrous Philistines—

[God had, for the punishment of his offending people, delivered the ark into the hands of their enemies: and the Philistines having triumphed, as they imagined, over the God of Israel, placed the ark, as a trophy, in the temple of Dagon their god. They had before "offered a great sacrifice to Dagon, when, as they supposed, he had delivered Samson into their hand[b]:" and now they endeavoured to do him still greater honour, by placing, as they imagined, the God of Israel at his feet. But behold, their God, without any visible cause, fell prostrate before the ark; and, when set up again in his place, again, the very next night, fell down before the ark, having both his head and his hands broken from the trunk. Should they not have learned from this that their idol had neither wisdom nor power to effect any thing[c]?

But when they would not understand from this sign the superiority of the God of Israel, Jehovah smote multitudes of them with a pestilence, of which they died; and multitudes also with emerods, (which are supposed to be a very grievous kind of *piles*[d]); insomuch that they were constrained to acknowledge that "his hand was sore upon them, and upon Dagon their god[e]." Wearied with their sufferings, they sent the ark to Gath: but there the same judgments were inflicted on the people, both small and great: so that they got it removed to Ekron; who were terrified at the prospect of experiencing the like calamities; and soon united in the general wish for its dismission from their country. Another judgment also which God inflicted on them contributed to make them anxious to restore the ark without delay, and to appease the wrath of him whose symbol it was: their country was suddenly overrun with mice, which destroyed all the fruits of the earth. A consultation therefore was held by all the priests and diviners, to ascertain the best method of testifying their sorrow for the indignities offered to Jehovah: the result of which was, to send back the ark, with representations in gold both of the mice and of the emerods, five in number, one for each of the lords who ruled the country, and who were therefore fit representatives of the whole people.

But in their mode of executing this they shewed how reluctant they were to part with the ark, or to acknowledge Jehovah's power. They put the ark on a cart, and yoked two milch kine to it, and left them to go whither they would; taking care however to shut up their calves at home, that, if they should, contrary to all their natural inclinations, go directly to the way of Beth-shemesh, it might be evident, beyond all possibility of doubt, that they were constrained to do so by the invisible power of Jehovah[f].

If

[b] Judg. xvi. 23, 24. [c] Ch. v. 1—5. [d] See Ps. lxxviii. 65, 66.
[e] Ch. v. 6, 7, 11, 12. [f] Ch. vi. 1—11.

In all this, however, God glorified himself, and shewed that the whole creation was subject unto him, and that He alone was "God over all the earth[g]."]

He had punished also his own presumptuous people—

[The men of Beth-shemesh received the ark, as it became them, with joy and gratitude; and immediately offered the kine a burnt-offering to the Lord. But soon they lost that reverence which they had been ever taught to feel towards that symbol of Jehovah, and with impious curiosity looked into the ark, which was not so much as to be seen by any except the High-priest, and by him only once in the year. For this profane conduct God smote the men of Beth-shemesh, even "fifty thousand and threescore and ten men," or, as it probably should rather be read, "fifty out of a thousand, even threescore and ten men." Terrified at this judgment, especially as connected with all the judgments that had been inflicted on the Philistines, the men of Beth-shemesh were as desirous to get rid of the ark, as ever the Philistines themselves had been. Instead of humbling themselves before him for their *sin*, they thought only of their *punishment*; and were willing rather to part with Jehovah himself, than to conciliate his favour by suitable humiliation.]

Such were the grounds of this desponding question. We now proceed to state,

II. The answer to be given to it—

Whatever reason for despondency there was in their apprehension, there was none in reality.

Doubtless the wicked can never stand before God—

[God is a holy Being, that "cannot look upon iniquity" without the utmost abhorrence of it. *The profane sinner*, however he may "contemn God," and "puff at his judgments," will have far other thoughts of God when once he begins to feel, either in his body or in his mind, the effects of his displeasure. Behold, how changed was the voice of Nebuchadnezzar, when he recovered from the malady which God had inflicted on him[h]! and what a contemptible "*god*" did Herod appear, when worms were devouring his vitals[i]! Or look at Belshazzar, with his knees smiting together at the sight of the hand-writing on the wall[k]; or at Felix, when Paul "reasoned with him of righteousness, temperance, and the judgment to come[l]:" how little were these persons able to stand before the Majesty of heaven! And shall it be thought, that when they shall be summoned before

[g] Ch. vi. 12. [h] Dan. iv. 30, 34, 35. [i] Acts xii. 21—23.
[k] Dan. v. 6. [l] Acts xxiv. 25.

before his tribunal in the last day, they will be able to make good their cause? No: they will wish for rocks and mountains to fall upon them and to "cover them from the wrath of the Lamb." Now they may justify themselves, and condemn the righteous; but in that day, we are assured, "The ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous[m]."

Nor will *the presumptuous and disobedient professor* stand before God: for "not every one that saith unto Christ, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of our Father which is in heaven." Men may plead that they have eaten and drunk in his presence, and done many wonderful works in his name; but the Lord Jesus will say to them, "Depart from me; I never knew you, ye workers of iniquity[n]."

O that every sinner would consider this; and that every professor of religion would search and try his ways! — — —]

But the true Believer has no cause to dread his presence—

[Even the removal of the judgments from the penitent Philistines is sufficient to shew that God delighteth in mercy, and that "judgment is his strange act," to which he is greatly averse. But there are numberless promises made to the Believer, promises which may "embolden him to enter into the holiest with the blood of Jesus" in his hand, just as the high-priest, on the day of annual expiation, entered with the blood of his sacrifices within the veil. Though he is in himself a guilty and corrupt creature, in Christ he stands before God without spot or blemish[o]: yea, "though his sins have been red as crimson, they are washed away, and he is made white as snow." Let him only be stedfast in the faith, and he has nothing to fear[p]. Whilst he shews forth his faith by his works, he may expect to enjoy that "peace of God which passeth all understanding[q]:" and especially, whilst he is filled with love, and therein bears the image of his God, he may look forward to the day of judgment with confidence and joy[r] — — — Know then, Believer, that "in Christ you may have boldness and access with confidence unto the Father by the faith of Christ[s];" and that in due time you shall "be presented faultless before him with exceeding joy[t]."]

OBSERVE then, from this subject,

1. How great an enemy to our welfare is slavish fear!

[What

[m] Ps. i. 5. [n] Matt. vii. 21—23. Luke xiii. 25—27.
[o] Eph. v. 27. [p] Heb. iii. 6. 1 John ii. 28.
[q] Heb. vi. 11. Isai. xxxii. 17.
[r] 1 John iii. 18—21. & iv. 16, 17.
[s] Eph. iii. 12. [t] Jude 24.

[What might not the Philistines and the Beth-shemites have obtained, if, instead of sending the ark from them through slavish terror, they had humbled themselves before it, and sought mercy of the Lord? But so it is with persons who are filled with slavish fear; they wish to banish that which inspires them with terror, rather than to part with their sin, which alone makes God an object of dread. Hence they will resort to any thing for peace, rather than to God himself, who alone can give them peace. But let this be a fixed principle in our minds; that whatever judgments we either feel or fear, we will not entertain hard thoughts of God. Let us bear in mind, that he is infinitely more willing to give than we are to ask; and that those who "come to him in the name of Jesus he will in no wise cast out."]

## 2. What a comfort to the soul is the knowledge of Christ!

[The dissolution of the world, and the coming of Christ to judgment, have nothing in them terrific to the true Believer. He has a refuge, and an hiding-place; yea "Christ himself is to him a sanctuary," where he is hid from the fear of evil[t] — — — O that we did but cultivate this knowledge more! Christ is the true ark, which contains that law that was fulfilled by him, and is covered by the mercy-seat, from whence mercy is dispensed to all his believing people. Into that ark we may look; not indeed with unhallowed curiosity, but with an humble desire to understand all the mysteries of redemption. The cherubim that overshadowed the mercy-seat intimated to us, not only what the angels in heaven are doing, (for they are constantly endeavouring to look into this mystery[u],) but what we also should do. St. Paul, after preaching Christ for twenty years, still pressed forward for a further knowledge of him; and with the same view we also should be "searching the Scriptures which testify of him." This is a knowledge in comparison of which all things else are as dung and dross[x]: and the more we attain of it, the more shall we be transformed into his image[y], and be rendered meet for the glory which he has prepared for us[z].]

[t] Isai. xlv. 17. [u] 1 Pet. i. 12. [x] Phil. viii. 7—10.
[y] 2 Cor. iii. 18. [z] Col. i. 12.

## CXCV.

### SAMUEL'S SUCCESSFUL INTERCESSION.

1 Sam. vii. 8, 9. *And the children of Israel said to Samuel, Cease not to cry unto the Lord our God for us, that he will save us out of the hand of the Philistines. And Samuel took a sucking-lamb, and offered it for a burnt-offering wholly unto the Lord: and Samuel cried unto the Lord for Israel: and the Lord heard him.*

THERE is scarcely a more striking instance of reformation to be found in all the holy Scriptures, than in the chapter before us. The people of Israel had long been in a state of awful departure from God. They had presumptuously confided in the ark at a former period, as though its very presence was sufficient to secure them the victory over the most powerful enemies[a]: but now, though it had been restored to their country twenty years, no one had shewn any just regard to it. We may well suppose, however, that Samuel had not been idle: indeed we apprehend that the general reformation which took place at this time, was the fruit of his labours. Availing himself of the deep impression which had been made on the minds of the whole nation, he proposed to meet all the elders of Israel at Mizpeh, with a view to keep a fast unto the Lord. This measure was adopted: but the Philistines, imagining that the collecting of so many persons at one place was with a view to combine for military purposes, took the alarm, and determined to make an assault on them, before they should have been able to arrange their plans, and prepare themselves for the battle. The approach of the Philistines produced great consternation at Mizpeh, and necessitated the Israelites to stand on their defence. But, conscious of their incapacity to resist their foes, they besought Samuel to intercede with God for them. His intercession is the subject which we propose for our present consideration; and we shall notice it,

As

[a] Chap. iv. 3—5.

I. As solicited by them—

They had now learned by experience that God alone could help them—.

[They did not, as formerly, resort to the ark for aid: nor did they confide in an arm of flesh: Jehovah himself was now their hope: and they sought him in a manner that was truly becoming: "they lamented after him," being grieved at their hearts that they had provoked him to depart from them: they "drew water, and poured it out before him," expressing thereby the depth of their sorrow[b]: and "they fasted," in order to beget in themselves a more penitent sense of all their transgressions. In this frame of mind they betook themselves to Him, whose power had so often proved effectual for their support.]

But, conscious of their own unworthiness, they sought with all earnestness the intercession of Samuel—

[Very striking is their address to him; "Cease not to pray unto God for us." They were persuaded that "the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man would avail much." Hence they intreated Samuel to intercede for them. But they remembered that the intercession of Moses against Amalek was no longer successful than whilst his hands were held up in prayer; and therefore they importuned Samuel not to suspend for a moment his cries to God in their behalf. Happy were they in having such an intercessor; and happy in having an heart to acknowledge his worth, and to seek his aid.]

Let us next attend to the intercession,

II. As offered by him—

He offered to the Lord a burnt-offering—

[Though Samuel was not a priest, he officiated as a priest on this occasion, and was doubtless accepted of God in that service. The presenting of a sucking-lamb upon the altar intimated that neither the people nor himself could approach unto God, or hope for any mercy at his hands, but through that great Sacrifice which should one day be offered, even that Lamb of God which should take away the sins of the whole world. At the same time, as a burnt-offering, it was intended to honour God, who had so often succoured them in the hour of need. This affords an important hint to us in all our addresses at the throne of Grace: we must implore mercy solely through the sacrifice of Christ, and acknowledge God's perfections as glorified, in all his dispensations, whether of mercy or of judgment, of providence or of grace———]

I. This

[b] Ps. xxii. 14.

This sacrifice he accompanied with fervent prayer—

[Samuel well knew, that as prayer without a sacrifice would be of no avail, so neither would a sacrifice without prayer. He therefore "*cried unto the Lord.*" O what is intimated in that expression! what humility, what fervour, what importunity! Such is the prayer that God requires; and such prayer, offered in dependence on our great Sacrifice, shall never go forth in vain[c].]

The efficacy of his intercession will be seen, if we notice it,

III. As accepted of the Lord—

*Instantly* did God vouchsafe to answer it—

[Before the offering of the lamb was finished, God's acceptance of the prayer was manifest. The Philistines approached to the battle; but were so intimidated and confounded by thunder and lightning, that they fell an easy prey to those whom they had expected utterly to destroy. Thus the intervention of God was seen in the clearest light. Had the victory been gained solely by the sword of Israel, they might have ascribed it to their own skill and prowess: but when it arose from causes that were entirely out of the reach of men, they could not but acknowledge that God himself had interposed in answer to the prayer of Samuel. Signal as this favour was, we are warranted to expect a similar acceptance of our prayers, if only we ask in humility and faith. Jehosaphat obtained a similar answer under circumstances precisely similar[d]: and with equal speed was Daniel answered, when praying for himself[e]: and we also shall be heard in like manner, if we draw nigh to God, as it is both our privilege and our duty to do[f].]

He answered too to the utmost extent of the petitions offered—

[Deliverance out of the hands of the Philistines was the mercy asked; and so entirely was this deliverance effected, that the Philistines never came again into the land of Israel as long as Samuel lived.

We too may expect that God will exceed our utmost requests. If we are straitened at all, it is not in him, but in ourselves. If we were more earnest, and more enlarged in prayer, our blessings would be proportionably multiplied[g].]

We may LEARN from hence,

1. On what our safety *as a nation* rests—

[We should imitate their repentance — reformation — faith— and

[c] Ps. l. 15. [d] 2 Chron. xx. 21, 22. [e] Dan. ix. 19—23.
[f] Isai. lxv. 24. [g] 2 Kin. xiii. 18. Eph. iii. 20.

and zeal—and should unite, both Ministers and people, in committing our cause to God———]

2. How our safety *as individuals* is to be secured—

[There is no other way for individuals than for nations: only in nations the mercies of God may be enjoyed by those who have been at no pains to seek them; whereas every individual must stand or fall according to his own exertions in the ways of penitence and faith.]

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## CXCVI.

### MEMORIALS OF GOD'S GOODNESS.

1 Sam. vii. 12. *Then Samuel took a stone, and set it between Mizpeh and Shen, and called the name of it Eben-ezer; saying, Hitherto hath the Lord helped us.*

THERE is in the generality of men a very culpable inattention to the ways of Providence. A variety of dispensations succeed each other without ever attracting their notice. Hence they are unconscious of any kindness exercised towards them; and are ready to ascribe their success to themselves, or even to chance, rather than to God. But, if they would observe the many strange and unforeseen events which arise, and notice how they concur to promote their welfare, they would "understand the loving-kindness of the Lord," and be constrained to acknowledge his wise and gracious agency.

The veil with which modern occurrences are covered, is, in the Scriptures, removed; and we see "the holy arm of the Lord made bare." We at this day should regard a storm as a mere accidental thing, common perhaps at the time of year; and think little of God, "who maketh the clouds his chariots, and his ministers a flame of fire." But, in the passage before us, the victory gained by means of a storm is ascribed to the merciful interposition of Jehovah. By means of the thunder which terrified the Philistine army, the unprepared Israelites were enabled to destroy them, and to break the power of those who for twenty years had grievously oppressed them: nor was it a little remarkable, that this

this victory was gained upon the very spot where, twenty years before, God had delivered both them and the ark in which they vainly trusted, into the hands of the Philistines. To commemorate the goodness of the Lord, "Samuel set up a stone, which he called Eben-ezer, saying, Hitherto hath the Lord helped us."

From these words we shall take occasion to shew,

I. What reason *we* have to erect similar memorials—

Whether the agency of God be more or less visible, it is certain that not so much as a sparrow falls to the ground without his special direction. Let us then take a view of the mercies he has vouchsafed to us. These have been,

1. Public—

[These have been exceeding great[a] — — — and they demand our devoutest acknowledgments.]

2. Private—

[We shall find abundant cause of thankfulness, if we survey our *temporal* mercies. How are we indebted to God for *life*, when multitudes have been taken into the eternal world; and for *health*, when many have been pining away with sickness, or racked with acute disorders! What an unspeakable mercy is it that our *reason* is continued to us, when many are bereft of this noble faculty, and thereby reduced, like Nebuchadnezzar, to a level with the beasts! What do we owe to God, if we have found *comfort in our relatives* and connexions, (for it is God that maketh men to be of one mind in a house,") and if death has not been permitted to rob us of those, in whose welfare we are deeply interested! Perhaps during the preceding year we have entered into *new connexions*, or had our *families enlarged*. Perhaps our *business* has *prospered*; or the *difficulties* with which we have contended, have been *overcome*. In all these things we ought to acknowledge the hand of God, and to think how highly favoured we have been above myriads of our fellow-creatures.

But if we turn our thoughts to the contemplation of our *spiritual*

[a] Those specified at the close of the year 1804, were, our long-continued preservation from foreign invasion, or domestic tumults, or even the sound of war; as also our freedom from pestilences, earthquakes, and hurricanes, which had recently committed dreadful ravages in Spain, America, and the West Indies. But these things must of course be varied, according to the occasion on which the subject is used, whether it be *Victory*, or *Peace*, or any other signal mercy.

*spiritual* mercies, what ground shall we find for the liveliest gratitude, and the profoundest adoration! That *the ordinances of the Gospel* are continued to us, when, for our misimprovement of them "our candlestick might so justly have been removed;" what a blessing is this! If we only consider that the preached Gospel is, though not the only, yet the principal mean which God makes use of for the salvation of men, we never can be sufficiently thankful that its sound has reached our ears, and its light been exhibited before our eyes; "for many prophets and kings have in vain desired to see and hear these things," which we so richly enjoy.

We have all, more or less, been made the subjects of *restraining grace:* and O, what a tribute of praise does that demand! How many of our fellow-creatures have brought themselves to an untimely end, either by their excesses, or by the hands of the public executioner! How many unhappy females protract a miserable existence by the wages of prostitution! How many, either to conceal their shame, or to avenge a quarrel, have committed murder! How many, to rid themselves of their present troubles, have madly rushed on suicide! Whence is it, I would ask, that we have not fallen into one or other of these evils? Are we made of better materials than they? "Have we not all one Father?" Did *they*, previous to the commission of their evil deeds, imagine themselves more likely to fall than we? Let us acknowledge "the good hand of God upon us:" it is God who alone has made us to differ: and if he had not preserved us by his restraining grace, we should at this moment have been numbered with the most miserable and abandoned of the human race.

Some amongst us, we trust, have been made to experience *converting grace.* And what cause for thankfulness have *they!* Look around, and see how few even of those who statedly hear the Gospel are savingly converted by it! What then do *they* owe to God, who have been quickened from the dead; who have had their sins blotted out by the blood of Jesus; who have been made partakers of a divine nature, and heirs of the kingdom of heaven! Should not they raise an Eben-ezer to the Lord?

Nor have *they* less cause for thankfulness who have received *establishing grace.* Consider how many have "begun to run well, and afterwards been hindered:" some waxing cold in their regard to religion; others "turning aside to vain jangling;" some drawn into infidelity; and others making religion itself hateful and abominable, by their hypocrisy or open impiety. Never does a year pass, but some instances of grievous backsliding occur, to the great dishonour of God, and the grief of all his people. And why are not *we* the persons that have been left to fall? Have we felt no secret inclination to sin? Have we on no occasion yielded to the suggestions of our great adversary, so that nothing but Omnipotence, snatching us like brands out of the burning,

burning, could have preserved us? Have we never inwardly backslidden, so that if God had not for his own mercy's sake restored us, we must have departed for ever. Let us only examine the records of our own hearts, and call our own ways to remembrance; and there is not one of us who will not be ready to look upon himself as the greatest monument of mercy that can be found on earth.

Whether then we consider our temporal or our spiritual mercies, we cannot but find unbounded occasion to raise grateful memorials to the Lord our God.]

But it will be proper to shew,

II. In what manner we should do it—

External and visible monuments are very proper expressions of national gratitude: but, as individuals, we must erect very different memorials;—

1. We must get a sense of God's goodness engraven on our hearts—

[We need not to form inscriptions on stone or brass: we are concerned rather to have the mercies of our God written upon our hearts. But here is our great fault: we do not "keep his great goodness in remembrance:" we "forget him at the sea, even at the Red Sea." One single calamity will call forth complaints in abundance: but ten thousand mercies are scarcely sufficient to raise the soul to God, or to excite one desire to requite his love. Sensible of this, David stirred up his soul to the performance of its duty: "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and let all that is within me bless his holy name: bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits." It is in this way that we must raise memorials to God: and such memorials he will not despise. One grateful and devout acknowledgment is a more pleasing sacrifice to him than the cattle upon a thousand hills: "Whoso offereth him praise, glorifieth him."]

2. We must endeavour to impress others also with a sense of it—

[This is a method of perpetuating the remembrance of his goodness, which the Lord himself has prescribed[a]. And the more sensible we ourselves are of his kindness to us, the more shall we exert ourselves to preserve the knowledge of it in this way. How admirable is the example of David in this particular! He seems to have laboured with all his might, not merely to praise God with his own lips, but to interest all, whether of his own or future generations, in the same blessed employment[b]. On the contrary, how severely was Hezekiah rebuked for ostentatiously

[a] Ps. lxxviii. 5—7. [b] Ps. cxlv. 1—7.

tatiously displaying his own riches, when he should have been magnifying to the Babylonish ambassadors the Lord's goodness, and commending to them the knowledge of the God of Israel[c]! It is possible enough that he might pretend to give God the glory; but God, who knew his heart, saw that he was lifted up with pride: so we are in danger of erecting memorials rather for our own honour, than for God's: but we must be exceeding jealous upon this head, lest, instead of pleasing, we offend the Majesty of heaven; and lest, instead of bringing a blessing upon ourselves, we entail a curse. We may boast; but our boast must be of God, and not of ourselves: we may raise monuments; but they must be truly "Eben-ezers," ascribing every thing to "the Lord's help," and not to an arm of flesh.]

3. We must testify our sense of it by an increased devotion to his service—

[If we are sincere in our acknowledgments, we shall be inquiring, "What shall I render to the Lord for all the benefits that he hath done unto me? The end for which our God vouchsafes his mercies to us, is, that we may bring forth fruit to his glory: and, if he find that all his pains and culture are without effect, he will cut us down as "cumberers of the ground[d]." Whatever be our character then, we must make this improvement of the Lord's goodness to us: if we are impenitent, it must lead us to repentance; if we are already his servants, it must constrain us to increased diligence in his service, and cause us to abound more and more in every good word and work. We must not satisfy ourselves with empty commendations, crying, 'Lord, Lord;' but must do with cheerfulness and delight whatsoever he commands us.]

4. We must trust him in all future difficulties and dangers—

[This is a very principal end of raising memorials of any kind: it is, not merely to remind us of what God has done, but of what he is ever ready to do, if we call upon him. Here again we are called to admire the conduct of David, who regarded the deliverances which he had experienced from the paws of the lion, and of the bear, as arguments for trusting in God, and for expecting a similar deliverance from the sword of Goliath[e]. St. Paul also made a similar improvement of the mercies vouchsafed to him; saying, "God hath delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver; in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us[f]." Trials will succeed each other, as "clouds coming after rain:" we are not to expect a termination of them, till we are called to our

[c] 2 Kin. xx. 12—18. with 2 Chron. xxxii. 24, 25, 31.
[d] Isai. v. 3—6. Heb. vi. 7, 8. [e] 1 Sam. xvii. 37.
[f] 2 Cor. i. 10.

our rest above. Yet while on this account we can only say, "*Hitherto* hath the Lord helped us," we may safely commit ourselves into his hands, knowing, that "whoso trusteth in the Lord, shall be even as Mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but standeth fast for ever[g]."]

[g] Ps. cxxv. 1.

## CXCVII.

### THE DUTY OF COMMEMORATING GOD'S MERCIES.

1 Sam. vii. 12. *Then Samuel took a stone, and set it between Mizpeh and Shen, and called the name of it Eben-ezer; saying, Hitherto hath the Lord helped us.*

THE Jews lived under a Theocracy, and received from God a greater number of visible interpositions in their favour than any other nation under heaven. In remembrance of these, many different memorials were erected, and many rites instituted; that so the people might be kept in a stedfast adherence to him as their rightful Sovereign, and in a constant dependence on him as their almighty Protector. But they were ever prone to depart from him, and to transfer their allegiance to the gods of the heathen that were no gods, but idols of wood and stone. For these iniquities they were frequently given up into the hands of their enemies, and left to feel the bitter consequences of their impiety. But, when they were made sensible of their guilt, and brought to humble themselves before God, he returned in mercy to them, and effected for them the deliverance they implored. Such an interposition was obtained for them by the prayers of Samuel; and in remembrance of it was the stone erected, to which my text refers.

But, as God is the Governor of all the earth, and interposes still for his people as really, though not so visibly, as in the days of old, we will not confine our views of this transaction to the particular deliverance to which it primarily refers, but will extend them generally to the Church at large; and consider it as,

I. A com-

I. A commemorative act—

The Jews at this time were grievously oppressed by the Philistines. Samuel called them to repentance, and promised, that, if they would put away their false gods, and return with penitential sorrow to the Lord their God, they should be delivered out of the hands of their enemies. That their return to Jehovah might be the more solemn and universal, Samuel appointed all the heads of the nation to meet him at Mizpeh. But the Philistines, jealous of so large an assemblage of Israelites on the borders of their country, came forth to attack them: and God, in answer to the prayers of Samuel, rescued his people from their hands, and utterly discomfited the Philistine armies. To commemorate this deliverance, Samuel "put up the stone, which he called Ebenezer, saying, Hitherto hath the Lord helped us." But, to understand the precise scope of this memorial, we must advert to the means by which the deliverance was obtained. Then we shall see that the stone thus raised, proclaimed, to the whole nation,

1. That God is a hearer of prayer—

[This the people could not but acknowledge, since they all had applied to Samuel to intreat the Lord in their behalf[a]. And this was a truth which it was of the utmost importance to commemorate, since it demonstrated Jehovah to be the only true God. To this truth the whole Scriptures bear witness. It was in answer to the cries of Israel that God had formerly delivered them from Egypt, and brought them in safety through the Red Sea. When Amalek came forth against them to destroy them in the wilderness, it was not by the sword of Joshua, but by the prayers of Moses, that Israel obtained the victory: for, when the hands of Moses hanged down, Amalek prevailed; but, in consequence of their being held up until the evening, Israel prevailed, and gained at last a complete triumph. In every part of their history the same truth was manifested[b] — — — And to this hour are the memorials of it the greatest possible encouragements to seek for mercy at his hands.]

2. That he will deliver his penitent and believing people—

[Here we must have an especial eye to the occasion before us.

[a] ver. 8. [b] See Ps. cvi. 43, 44. & Ps. cvii. throughout.

us. The people, in compliance with the exhortations of Samuel, prayed, and fasted, and confessed their sins, and put away their strange gods, and gave themselves up to Jehovah, "to serve him only[c]." This shewed the sincerity of their repentance, without which they could not hope for mercy at God's hands.

But, as humiliation *alone* could be of no avail, Samuel offered a sucking-lamb as a burnt-offering to God, thereby acknowledging the people's desert to be utterly consumed, and their hope of acceptance only through a vicarious sacrifice. And it is remarkable, that, as Samuel was in the very act of offering this sacrifice, "God thundered with a great thunder upon the Philistines," and, by the terror which those thunders inspired, caused them to fall an easy prey to the sword of Israel[d].

Thus the people were reminded, that in all their approaches to the throne of Grace there must be an union of penitence and faith: and that, whenever they so approached God, they should assuredly be delivered, however great might be the difficulties in which they were involved, or imminent the dangers to which they were exposed.]

But to all future ages also was this memorial intended to convey,

II. An instructive lesson—

It plainly teaches us,

1. That we should often review our past mercies—

[All have received mercies in abundance, which they ought from time to time to review, in order to impress a sense of them the more deeply on their minds. For want of this, how many mercies are forgotten! and what loss do we sustain by means of our forgetfulness! Blessings that are unnoticed are no more to us than they are to the brute creation: but if we bring them frequently to our remembrance, we have frequently in the retrospect a sweeter taste of them than we had in the actual possession. From this act of Samuel's then let us learn to pass over no mercy without labouring to imprint it on our minds, and to retain the remembrance of it to our dying hour.]

2. That we should especially view the hand of God in them—

[It is this which gives the chief zest to all our mercies. And to whom can we trace them, but to God? Look at your *temporal mercies;* the time, and place of your birth, when the light of the Gospel was shining all around you—your preservation during

[c] ver. 6.

[d] ver. 9—11. A still more glorious testimony he gave to Peter's exhibition of this Lamb of God as crucified for the sins of men. See Acts x. 43, 44.

during the helpless state of infancy, which so many myriads of human beings never survive—the many deliverances, seen, and unseen, which you have experienced since—the blessings of health and abundance, whilst so many have spent their days in sickness and want—View but the last year, and see how many have been plunged into deep distress, from which you are exempt; or been called away into the eternal world, whilst you are left with protracted opportunities of working out your salvation ———Think of your *spiritual mercies*—Have you any measure of light in your minds, of softness in your hearts, of holiness in your lives? Have you any hopes in Christ as your Saviour; any experience of the Spirit as your Comforter; any prospects of heaven, as your inheritance? Think of multitudes around you, or look at those who are gone beyond redemption, and say, whether it is within the power of language to express your obligations to your God. For who is it that has made you to differ? Will you, or can you, trace these blessings to your own superior wisdom, or goodness, or strength? Must you not of necessity acknowledge the hand of God in them, and say, "Hitherto hath the Lord helped us?" Surely in reference to every blessing, whether temporal or spiritual, you must say with David, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name be the praise."]

3. That we should make our experience of past mercies the ground of expecting all that we can need from God in future—

[Doubtless the memorial raised by Samuel was particularly intended to answer this end. And so should the memorials that are raised in our hearts: "Thou hast been my help; *therefore* under the shadow of thy wings will I rejoice[e]:" "*Because* the Lord hath inclined his ear unto me, *therefore* will I call upon him as long as I live[f]." This was St. Paul's mode of improving past mercies: "God," says he, "delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver; in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us[g]." From what we have received "*hitherto*," we know what to expect *henceforth*. O blessed effect of preserving memorials of past mercies in our minds! What holy confidence will it introduce into the soul, and what a happy anticipation even of eternal blessedness! Only let the "Eben-ezer" which Samuel erected teach us this, and we shall ourselves raise in due time a similar memorial in the realms of bliss.]

APPLICATION—

1. Take now a review of all that God has done for you in times past—

[Let

[e] Ps. lxiii. 7. [f] Ps. cxvi. 2. [g] 2 Cor. i. 10.

[Let those who are yet living as without God in the world contemplate God's forbearance towards them — — — Let those who have been brought out of darkness into the marvellous light of the Gospel survey the riches of Divine grace displayed towards them — — — Let Believers bring to their remembrance their manifold temptations, their grievous backslidings, their repeated falls; or, if they have been kept from falling, the almost miraculous succours by which they have been upheld — — — Then will the example before us have its due effect; and God will receive the glory due unto his name.]

2. Look forward now to all that you can need from God in times to come—

[Nothing but a sense of our necessities will keep us properly dependent on God. Let your minds then be continually intent on this subject. Think of all you need for body — — — or for soul — — — for time — — — or for eternity — — — And then see what need you have of help from God in future. Yet be not disheartened by the sight of all your necessities; but remember, that however great they be, "God is able to supply all your need out of his riches in glory by Christ Jesus." Call to mind the promises of help which God has given you in his word[h]; see how ample they are; how repeated; how strong! Though thou art but "a worm," yet through him "thou shalt thresh the mountains." In a full persuasion of this, commit your every concern to him, and expect that he will be "a very present help to you in every time of need." Only trust in him with your whole hearts, and "you shall not be ashamed or confounded world without end."]

[h] Isai. xli. 10—16.

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## CXCVIII.

### THE ISRAELITES' REJECTION OF SAMUEL REPROVED.

1 Sam. xii. 16—23. *Now therefore stand and see this great thing, which the Lord will do before your eyes. Is it not wheat-harvest to-day? I will call unto the Lord, and he shall send thunder and rain; that ye may perceive and see that your wickedness is great, which ye have done in the sight of the Lord, in asking you a king. So Samuel called unto the Lord; and the Lord sent thunder and rain that day: and all the people greatly feared the Lord and Samuel. And all the people said unto Samuel, Pray for thy servants unto the Lord thy God, that we die not: for we have added unto all our sins this evil, to ask us a king. And Samuel said*

*said unto the people, Fear not: (ye have done all this wickedness; yet turn not aside from following the Lord, but serve the Lord with all your heart; and turn ye not aside; for then should ye go after vain things, which cannot profit nor deliver; for they are vain:) for the Lord will not forsake his people for his great name's sake; because it hath pleased the Lord to make you his people. Moreover, as for me, God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you.*

THERE is scarcely any more curious part of sacred history than that which relates to the appointment of Saul to the throne of Israel. He was a man of noble stature, but of a low family. His father's asses had strayed, and he went with a servant three days in search of them. His provisions were exhausted; and he thought of returning home, lest his father should begin to be anxious about him. His servant understanding that they were not far from the abode of Samuel, whom they supposed to be a kind of magician, and capable of informing them where the asses were, proposed that they should call upon him, and seek that information at his hands: but having no money left, to pay this magician for his trouble, they were discouraged; having no idea that he would give his advice without a fee. The servant however said he had the fourth part of a shekel (about seven-pence of our money) left, and that they would offer him that. Accordingly they went; and were informed that the asses were found. But Saul had further information, that quite astonished him. The people of Israel had requested Samuel to appoint a king over them; and God, on being applied to by Samuel, directed him to comply with their request; and told him moreover, that this very Saul was the person whom he should appoint. Accordingly he told Saul what God had ordained; and gave him several signs whereby he should know infallibly that the matter was of God: and then convoked the people, and drew lots before the Lord; and Saul was the person on whom the lot fell. Saul, through modesty, hid himself; but God disclosed to Samuel the place where he was hid:

and

and Samuel sent for him, and committed to him the charge of the kingdom, for which God then fitted him by some special gifts.

Were we to judge only from that part of the history to which we have already alluded, we should suppose that this change in the Constitution of Israel was pleasing to God: but Samuel, by Divine command, declared the contrary, and condemned the people with great severity. This is related in the words of our text; from whence we shall be led to notice,

I. The sin committed—

The Israelites desired to change the form of their government, and to have a king appointed over them—

[For this desire they had many specious reasons. Samuel was now old, and incapable of supporting the fatigues of government: he had therefore delegated a large portion of his authority to his sons, who, alas! were far from walking in his steps, or executing aright the trust reposed in them. This was assigned as one reason for their request[a]. But though this would have justified a request for Samuel's interposition to reprove, or even to depose, them, it was by no means a sufficient reason for them to seek an extinction of that form of government which God himself had appointed, and a substitution of another in its stead.

They were now also alarmed with the menaces of Nahash, king of the Ammonites, who was preparing to invade them[b]: and they wished to have the power of their government vested in the hands of one who should be able to protect them. But they needed not an arm of flesh, whilst they had Jehovah for their king: and if Jehovah had not delivered them according to their desire, it was owing to themselves, who by their sins had forfeited his protection. They therefore should have made this an occasion of humiliation and of turning unto God, and not an occasion of desiring another king in the place of God.

Besides, they wished to be in this respect like the nations around them[c], forgetting that a *Theocracy* was their highest honour, and most distinguished privilege.]

This desire of theirs was exceeding sinful—

[It was, in the first place, an act of great folly; for they enjoyed all the benefits of kingly government, without any of its expenses or of the evils generally arising out of it[d] ——— In the next place, it was a mark of base ingratitude towards Samuel,

[a] Ch. viii. 1—5.
[b] Ch. xii. 12.
[c] Ch. viii. 19, 20.
[d] ib. ver. 9—18.

muel, who had spent his whole life in their service: and in this view Samuel could not but feel it, and complain of it. Yet so heavenly was his mind, that instead of resenting it, he committed it to God in prayer; and never complained of it till after the appointment of a king had been ratified and confirmed. Then indeed he appealed to them, whether he had not conducted himself towards them with the most unblemished integrity[e]——— But past services were of little account with persons so infatuated and self-willed as that people were at this time. But further, it was also a direct and open rejection of God himself. This was the construction which God himself put upon it[f]. And how little HE deserved this treatment at their hands, Samuel shewed them, by recounting to them the mercies which he had vouchsafed unto their nation, from its first existence even to that day[g].

But they were deaf to every statement that he could make, and insensible to every feeling that should have actuated their minds: for who can convince those who are determined not to be convinced? "Nay; but we *will*[h]," is but a poor answer from those who are taught what *God* willeth. It is indeed the answer of sinners in general: but all who make such a reply, will hear of it again from God himself.]

What we are to think of their conduct, will further appear from,

II. The reproof administered—

Such wickedness as this could not pass unreproved. Samuel therefore "solemnly protested against them," as God had commanded; and then proceeded to deal with them in that way which he conceived to be most conducive to their amendment:

1. He desired a judgment from God, with a view to their humiliation—

[Their was not at that time any appearance of a storm, nor was the wheat-harvest a season when storms often occurred. But he requested of God to manifest his displeasure by a sudden tempest: and immediately the thunders rolled, the rain descended in torrents, and the indignation of the Lord was clearly shewn; insomuch that "the people greatly feared both the Lord and Samuel." Thus was the desired effect produced: the people saw that they had sinned; and intreated the intercession of Samuel, that they might not be punished according to their deserts. How different is the voice of God from that of man! *that* will convince the most obstinate, and soften the most obdurate:

[e] Ch. xii. 2—5. [f] Ch. viii. 7. [g] Ch. x. 17—19. & xii. 7—11.
[h] Ch. viii. 19. & Ch. xii. 12. [i] Ch. vii. 10.

obdurate: and, sooner or later, they who will not yield to the remonstrances of God's servants, shall be spoken to in a way which they can neither gainsay nor resist.]

2. He proclaimed mercy from God with a view to their encouragement—

[There was nothing vindictive in the conduct of Samuel: he lamented that the people should act so wickedly, and that God should be so dishonoured; but he willingly sacrificed his own interests, and cheerfully resigned the power which had been committed to him. He saw how agitated the people were; and gladly embraced the opportunity of pouring balm into their wounds. He bade them "not fear;" for though they had sinned greatly, God would not utterly cast them off; and though there was nothing in *them* to induce him to shew mercy, he would be merciful to them "for *his great name's sake.*" It was not for any merit of theirs that God had ever made them his people, but purely of his own sovereign will and pleasure: and, to shew them "the immutability of his counsel," he would still continue his favours to them, notwithstanding this great transgression. They must however turn unto *him*, and cleave unto *him*, and no longer look unto the creature for deliverance; for on no other terms would he acknowledge them as his people, or vouchsafe unto them the blessings which he had reserved for them. As far as depended on himself, Samuel assured them, that *he* would harbour no resentment for the indignity offered him, but would continue to pray for them to his dying hour. Thus admirably did he temper severity with kindness, and soften fidelity with love.]

By way of IMPROVEMENT, let us BEWARE lest there be amongst us also any who reject God—

[If the rejection of *Samuel* was a rejection of *God*, what must a rejection of CHRIST be? and yet, how many are there who say of HIM, "We will not have this man to reign over us[k]!" Yes, though expostulated with, and warned with all fidelity, how many persist in this awful determination! They say in effect to their Minister, "As for the word that thou hast spoken to us in the name of the Lord, we will not hearken unto thee[l]." To disregard the voice of his faithful Ministers may appear a small thing; but it is not really so; for Jesus identifies himself with his servants; "He that receiveth you, receiveth me; and he that receiveth me, receiveth him that sent me[m]." Beware then, Brethren, how you presume to set aside the authority of Christ, or to place a rival upon his throne. God may give you your own way; but it will be a curse to you, and not a blessing. Woe be unto you indeed, if you provoke God to "choose your delu-

[k] Luke xix. 14. [l] Jer. xliv. 16. [m] Matt. x. 40.

delusions[n]." He says of Israel, "I gave them a king *in mine anger*, and took him away in my wrath[o];" as you know he did, in a miserable and disgraceful manner[p]. Beware lest such be the termination of your ways also, and lest you "be given up to believe a lie, as a prelude to your final condemnation[q]." The direction of God to you is clear; "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself; but in ME is thy help: I will be thy King[r]." Let this counsel be welcomed by you; and your submission to his government shall ere long be followed by a participation of his glory.]

[n] Isai. lxvi. 4. [o] Hos. xiii. 11. [p] 1 Sam. xxxi. 3—10.
[q] 2 Thess. ii. 11, 12. [r] Hos. xiii. 9, 10.

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## CXCIX.

### JONATHAN'S VICTORY OVER THE PHILISTINES.

1 Sam. xiv. 6. *And Jonathan said to the young man that bare his armour, Come and let us go over unto the garrison of these uncircumcised: it may be that the Lord will work for us: for there is no restraint to the Lord to save by many or by few.*

SO frequent are the wonders recorded in the Scripture, that we scarcely notice them; yet so great are they, that it is rather owing to our inattention, than to any real exercise of faith, that we do not reject them as altogether incredible and fabulous. This account of Jonathan is inferior to few, either in the strangeness of his feats, or the magnitude of their results. That we may have a clear view of the matter, we shall shew,

I. The state to which the Israelites were reduced—

The consequences of their choice began now plainly to appear—

[They had desired a king, and had persisted in their request, notwithstanding all the expostulations of Samuel; and God had complied with their request. But Saul had not possessed the throne of Israel two years, before his kingdom was overcome by the Philistines, and brought into a state of the basest servitude. The Philistines would not so much as suffer the Israelites to have a smith of their own, lest they should make arms for them: so determined were they to keep the Israelites in the lowest state of subjection. Yet whilst they were in this state, Saul was imprudent enough to smite a garrison of the Philistines, and thereby to give his enemies a plea for utterly destroying the whole nation. Accordingly the Philistines called all their forces together, "thirty

"thirty thousand chariots, six thousand horsemen, and foot soldiers as the sands on the sea shore for number;" whilst Saul had but six hundred men, and not a single sword to be found amongst them all. To make their situation still more deplorable, Saul presumed to invade the priestly office, and to offer sacrifices to God without waiting the full time for Samuel that he had been expressly enjoined to wait; and thus he provoked God to take away from him the kingdom, and to transfer it to a person who should prove more worthy of it. Thus speedily was the nation reduced to ruin under that government which they had been so anxious to obtain.]

And such consequences may justly be apprehended by all who are bent upon their own wishes, in opposition to the mind and will of God—

[There is the same self-will in all of us: we do not like that God should choose for us: we think that we can contrive better for ourselves than he has done. If we feel any evil in existing circumstances, we do not so much consider how we may obtain his favour, as how we may ward off the effects of his displeasure. But inordinate desire of any kind will bring its own punishment along with it: and we shall all find at last, that our truest happiness consists, not in the accomplishment of our own will, or the indulgence of our own desires, but in the favour and protection of Almighty God — — — Perhaps there is not a man to be found, who must not after mature reflection acknowledge, that, if God had suffered him in some particular instance to attain his own wishes, or execute his own desires, he would have rendered himself the most miserable of the human race — — —]

But, if we see God's hand in their punishment, much more do we in their deliverance. Let us therefore consider,

II. The means by which their deliverance was effected—

When nothing but utter destruction could be expected, God was pleased to interpose for them. He stirred up the minds of Jonathan and his armour-bearer to go and attack a garrison, that, humanly speaking, was invincible even by a considerable force; and that too even in open day. They climbed up the rock in the very sight of their enemies, slew about twenty of them on the spot, spread terror through the whole camp of the Philistines, gave an opportunity for Saul and his adherents to pursue the

the fugitives, and would have utterly destroyed the whole Philistine army, if the rashness of Saul had not deprived his men of that refreshment which their exhausted strength required.

Wonderful was this victory, and most instructive: in contemplating it we cannot but see,

1. That God can work by the weakest means—

[Nothing can be conceived more inadequate to the occasion than the means that were here used — — — But God delights to magnify his own strength in his people's weakness, and to interpose for their deliverance in their greatest straits. It is for this very purpose that he often waits, till we are reduced to the lowest extremity[a]. It was for that end that he reduced the hosts of Gideon from two and thirty thousand to three hundred; that the glory of their victory might be all his own[b]. Whatever straits then or difficulties we may be in, we should consider that God is all-sufficient; and that "the things which are impossible to man, are possible with him."]

2. That a hope of his aid should encourage our exertions—

[Two things encouraged Jonathan; the one, "There is no restraint to the Lord to save, whether by many or by few;" and the other, "It may be that the Lord will work for us." And what greater encouragement can we want? for, "if God be for us, who can be against us?" When therefore we are tempted, from a view of our own weakness, to say, "There is no hope," we should call to mind "the great and precious promises" which God has given to us in his word, and the wonderful deliverances he has vouchsafed to his people in every age. In dependence upon him we should go forth, fearing nothing[c]. Being "strong in the Lord and in the power of his might," we should gird on our armour, or even go forth with a sling and a stone against every enemy, not doubting but that, like Goliath of old, he shall ere long fall before us.]

3. That faith in him will insure to us the victory—

["Who ever trusted in him and was confounded?" See what wonders have been wrought by faith in former ages[d]; and shall it have less efficacy now? Will it not still, as formerly, bring Omnipotence to our aid? Only have "faith as a grain of mustard-seed," and all mountains shall melt before you. Whilst faith is in exercise, we need not be afraid of viewing the obstacles that are in our way. Be it so, the enemy is entrenched on an almost inaccessible rock, and we cannot even get to him but in such

[a] Deut. xxxii. 36. [b] Judg. vii. 2—8.
[c] Ps. xxvii. 1—3. [d] Heb. xi. 32—35.

such a way as must expose us to instant death: be it so, that we have no one on our side, except perhaps a single companion as helpless as ourselves: be it so, that our enemy is not only prepared for our reception, but laughing to scorn our feeble attempts against him: it matters nothing; the victory is ours, if we go forth in faith; and not only "shall the devil flee from us, if we resist him thus in faith," but all his hosts also shall be put to flight, and "Satan himself shall be bruised under our feet shortly[e]."

Let those then who are ready to give way to desponding fears remember on what a "Mighty One their help is laid[f]," and let them "be strong in faith, giving glory to God[g]."]

[e] Rom. xvi. 20. [f] Ps. lxxxix. 19. [g] Rom. iv. 20.

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## CC.

### SAUL'S DISOBEDIENCE AND PUNISHMENT.

1 Sam. xv. 22, 23. *And Samuel said, Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt-offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams: for rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, he hath also rejected thee from being king.*

THE sins of God's enemies, and especially of those who obstruct his people in their way to Canaan, will certainly be punished: God indeed may bear long with them, even so long as to make them tauntingly exclaim, "Where is the promise of his coming?" but he will surely come at last, to their utter confusion and their eternal condemnation.

The Amalekites had very cruelly attacked the Israelites in the wilderness, and without any just occasion. God therefore gave them up to the sword of Joshua, and commanded that his people should in due time inflict upon them far more extensive judgments[a]. The time was now come that their iniquities were full: and therefore God commanded Saul to execute upon them the threatening which had been denounced several hundred years before. This command Saul neglected to execute as he should have done;

[a] Deut. xxv. 17—19.

done; and thereby brought upon himself the heavy displeasure of his God. We behold in our text,

I. The sin reproved—

It might appear a small thing in Saul to spare Agag and the best of the cattle, when he had been enjoined to destroy all; and his vindication of himself to Samuel has an air of plausibility about it, which might almost reconcile us to this act as not very exceptionable: but Samuel, in the words before us, characterizes the conduct of Saul,

1. As rebellion—

[The command which had been given was exceeding plain and strong. The solemnity with which it was given, "Hearken thou" &c.; the reason assigned for it, "What Amalek did to Israel in the way from Egypt;" the minuteness to which the order descended, "Go, smite Amalek, and destroy—utterly—all that they have—and spare them not—but slay man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass:" all this shewed that there was no option left him, no discretion; but that the whole was to be executed according to the command. Yet behold, through pride and covetousness he departed from the command, sparing Agag, to grace his triumph; and preserving the best of the flocks and herds, to enrich himself and his people. Thus by executing the command in part, and violating it in part, he shewed, that he made his own will, and not the will of God, the rule of his conduct. And what was this but rebellion against the Most High? It was justly so characterized by Samuel: and such is the interpretation which God will surely put on such conduct, wheresoever it be found. To be "partial in the law" is, in fact, to set aside the law; and to "offend against it willingly in any one point, is to be guilty of all[b]"———]

2. A stubbornness—

[Saul, on meeting Samuel, took credit to himself for having fulfilled the will of God[c]. Thus it is that sin *blinds the eyes* of men, and puffs them up with a conceit of having merited the Divine approbation by actions which in their principle and in their measure have been radically wrong.

Samuel, to convince him of his sin, appealed to "the bleating of the sheep, and the lowing of the oxen:" but Saul, with stubbornness of heart, persisted in avowing his innocence: yea, after the strongest remonstrances on the part of Samuel, authorized as they were, and commanded, by God himself, he still maintained, that *he* had done *his* duty, and that *the people only* were

[b] Jam. ii. 10. [c] ver. 13.

were to blame; nor were *they* materially wrong, since they had consulted no interest of their own, but only the honour of their God[d].

Here we see how sin *hardens the heart* also, and disposes men to resist conviction to the uttermost. Thus it was with our first parents at the first introduction of sin into the world: both of them strove to cast off the blame from themselves, the man on his wife, and the woman on the serpent[e]: and how ready *we* are to tread in their steps, every day's observation and experience will teach us———]

Let us next turn our attention to,

II. The reproof administered—

In our eyes perhaps this act of Saul may appear to have been only a slight and well-intentioned error; but in the sight of God it was a very grievous sin: for "rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry." Whatever we may imagine, the neglecting to serve the true God is but little different, in the estimation of our Judge, from the engaging in the service of a false god. Hence we find that the reproof administered was precisely such as the occasion called for.

We shall consider it in two points of view;

1. As exposing his sin—

[We are not to imagine that Samuel intended to disparage the sacrifices which God had commanded. The many testimonies which God had given of his favourable acceptance of them sufficiently shewed, that, when offered in a becoming manner, with humility of mind and a view to the sacrifice which should in due time be offered, they were highly pleasing in his sight. But, if put in competition with moral duties, and substituted for obedience, they are hateful in the sight of God[f]. He "requireth truth in the inward parts;" and more values the tribute of a thankful or contrite heart, than the cattle on a thousand hills[g]. The excuse therefore that was offered by Saul was only a mockery and an insult to his God. And whoever shall attempt a commutation of outward services for inward integrity of heart and life, or shall think to atone for the want of one by the abundance of the other, will deceive himself to his eternal ruin[gg]———]

2. As denouncing his punishment—

[God had before threatened to deprive him of the kingdom for

[d] ver. 14—21. [e] Gen. iii. 12, 13. [f] Isai. i. 11—16.
[g] Ps. l. 8—14. & li. 16, 17. [gg] Matt. xxiii. 23.

for presuming to offer sacrifices without waiting for Samuel according as he had been enjoined; and now that punishment was irreversibly decreed[h]. A sign too was now given him, that it should in due time be executed: as he rent the garment of Samuel, whom he endeavoured to detain, so would God rend from him that kingdom, which he was so unworthy to possess[i]. This itself was indeed but a slight punishment: but it was emblematic of the loss of God's eternal kingdom; a loss which no finite intellect can appreciate. Yet is that the loss which every creature shall sustain, who by his rebellion offends God, and by stubborn impenitence cuts off himself from all hope of mercy———]

We will conclude the subject with some ADVICE arising from it:

1. Learn how to estimate the path of duty—

[We are very apt to think *that* right which is most agreeable to our own wishes; and to lean rather to that which will gratify our pride or interest, than to that which calls for the exercise of self-denial. But we should be aware of the bias that is upon our own minds, and of our proneness to make the law of God bend to our prejudices and our passions. And we may be sure, that if a doubt exist about the path of duty, moral duties must be preferred to ceremonial; and, in general, it will be found safer to lean to that which thwarts our natural inclinations, than to that which gratifies them.]

2. Be open to conviction respecting any deviations from it—

[There is an extreme aversion in us all to acknowledge that we have done amiss. But to be "stout-hearted is to be far from righteousness;" and wherever God sees such a disposition, he will surely abase it[k]. We all see in others how ready they are to justify what is wrong, and to extenuate what they cannot justify. Let us remember that we also have this propensity; and let us guard against it to the utmost of our power. Let us rather, if we have erred, desire to find it out, and not rest till we have discovered it. We would not, if an architect were to warn us that our house were likely to fall, go and lie down in our beds without carefully inquiring into the grounds of his apprehension: a sense of danger would make us open to conviction. Let us therefore not be averse to see and acknowledge our guilt before God, lest our conviction of its existence come too late to avert its punishment.]

3. Let your humiliation be candid and complete—

[Saul confessed his sin, but still shewed his hypocrisy by his

[h] ver. 26. [i] ver. 27, 28. [k] Jam. iv. 6.

his anxiety to be honoured before men[l]. Hence, though Samuel so far complied as to go with him, and execute on Agag the judgment that had been denounced[m], yet he left him immediately afterwards, and *never visited him more*[n]. O fearful separation! The friend who just before had wept and prayed for him all night forsook him now for ever. From henceforth Saul was given up to sin and misery, till at last the vengeance of an incensed God came upon him to the uttermost. Would we escape his doom? let our humiliation be deep, and our repentance genuine: let us be willing to take shame to ourselves both before God and man; and be indifferent about the estimation of man, provided we may but obtain the favour of a reconciled God[o].]

[l] ver. 30. [m] ver. 32, 33. [n] ver. 35.
[o] Saul desired *Samuel* to "pardon him," ver. 25.

## CCI.

### DAVID AND GOLIATH.

1 Sam. xvii. 45, 46. *Then said David to the Philistine, Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield; but I come to thee in the name of the Lord of Hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied. This day will the Lord deliver thee into mine hand.*

THAT God acts in a sovereign way in the distribution of his favours is a truth to which proud man is very averse: yet does it meet us in every part of the holy Scriptures. We have seen it in the elevation of Saul to the regal office: it appears also in the selection of David, whom Samuel was ordered to anoint as successor to the throne[a]. We behold it now again in raising up David, whilst yet a youth untrained to war, to slay Goliath, from whom all the army of Israel fled. It might rather have been expected that Jonathan, who had already shewn a most extraordinary valour, should stand forth as a champion on this occasion; or at least that some valiant man should have been found in the camp to espouse his country's cause: but God had ordained that David should possess the throne of Saul; and by this means he began to educate, as it were, the youth for his destined office.

In

[a] 1 Sam. xvi. 1—13.

In the words before us we have David's address to his antagonist just on the commencement of his engagement with him: and from them we shall be led to notice,

I. The character of the combatants—

In Goliath we behold a proud, self-confident blasphemer—

[He was of gigantic stature, (above *eleven* feet in height, or, at the lowest possible computation, ten;) and possessed strength in proportion to his size. His armour was such as would have almost borne down a man of moderate strength[b]: and, clad in this, he deemed himself himself invulnerable and irresistible. Hence, whilst he stalked in proud defiance between the two hostile armies, he, in mind and spirit, presumed to defy even God himself.

Characters of this description are by no means uncommon in the world: for, though we behold not in these days men of such extraordinary bulk, we behold the same pride of heart in multitudes around us, who glorying in their own bodily or intellectual powers, use them only as instruments of aggrandizing themselves, and of insulting God[c].]

David, on the contrary, was humbly dependent on God alone—

[Being sent by his father to visit his brethren, he came to them in the ranks just at the time that this proud blasphemer was challenging the hosts of Israel. Filled with indignation at his impiety, and desirous to vindicate the honour of his God, he manifested a wish to accept the challenge: and, when reproved by his eldest brother, he meekly but firmly persisted in his purpose, saying, "What have I now done? Is there not a cause[d]?"

On being brought to Saul, and warned of his incompetency to contend with such a mighty and experienced warrior, he shewed at once what his true motives were, and in whom his confidence was placed. He had before experienced the protection of Heaven, in two conflicts with a lion and a bear, which he had slain, when they rose up against him; and he doubted not but that God would crown him with similar success in his conflict with this uncircumcised Philistine[e].

Saul would have lent him his own armour for the combat: but David found it only an encumbrance; and therefore went forth unarmed, except with a sling, and five stones in his shepherd's bag, confiding, not in any human means, but in the strength of the

[b] ver. 4—7. [c] Ps. xii. 3, 4. & lxxiii. 6—9.
[d] ver. 29. [e] ver. 33—36.

the living God. Hence when Goliath scorned his youthful appearance, and derided his preparations for the conflict, David replied in the words of our text, "Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield; but I come to thee in the name of the Lord of Hosts."

How striking was this contrast! how exemplary the conduct of David! and how illustrative of the spirit in which the true Christian goes forth against his spiritual enemies, and prepares to combat the world, the flesh, and the devil!]

The close of our text leads us to notice,

II. The issue of the conflict—

According to all human expectations it must be decided in favour of Goliath—

[There was, as it should appear, no room for competition between the combatants; the one a youth, a shepherd, unused to war, and destitute, as we may say, either of defensive or offensive armour; and the other, a man of immense strength, trained to war from his very youth, and armed with all that the ingenuity of man could furnish: his armour altogether impenetrable to the stones, with which alone the youth was prepared to oppose him.]

But his strength was weakness, when opposed to the God of Israel.

[The first stone which David cast at him, was directed by an unerring arm, and an almighty power: it pierced the forehead of Goliath, and in a moment realized the youth's prediction. Thus was the proud boaster "delivered into David's hand;" and David, unprovided with any sword of his own, took the sword of his adversary, and with it cut off his head. And no sooner did the Philistines behold their champion dead, than they fled from Israel with terror, and yielded themselves an easy prey to their pursuers.]

We forbear to suggest the various reflections naturally arising in the mind from this event, because God himself has told us,

III. The design of the dispensation—

It was intended,

1. For the instruction of the world—

[Men in general think but little of God; and because they do not see him, they are ready to suppose that he does not interfere in the affairs of men. They imagine that they may set at nought his authority, and pour contempt on his people, with impunity:

impunity: and, if left, like Goliath, to prosper for a season, their presumption is proportionably increased[f]. But God is no unconcerned spectator of his creatures' conduct: he marks down every thing in the book of his remembrance; and will vindicate his own honour at the appointed season; perhaps in that moment, when his adversary conceives himself most secure.

Think of this, ye who abuse your strength to the purposes of criminal indulgence, and who vaunt of your excesses in wine or debauchery of any kind. Think of this also, ye who oppose and deride religion. Remember whom it is that you are insulting. Goliath thought that he was defying Israel; but his defiance was in reality hurled against Jehovah himself. So you, though probably unconscious of it, are in reality fighting against God himself. And "will you continue to provoke HIM to jealousy? Are you stronger than HE?" "Will you be strong in the day that he shall deal with you? or will you thunder with a voice like his?" Ah, cease from this mad warfare, and cast down the weapons of your rebellion, and humble yourselves, while yet the sword of vengeance is unsheathed. Behold Goliah prostrate on the ground, a monument of human folly, and human weakness! Behold him placed for a monument to all succeeding ages, that "God resisteth the proud;" and that "him who walks in pride, He is able to abase!" God delivered him into David's hand *on purpose* that "all the earth might know that there is a God in Israel[g]."]

2. For the consolation of God's Israel—

[Great and mighty are the enemies of God's people; and most unequal is the contest in which they are engaged. They may well say, "We have no power or might against this great company that cometh against us." But in this dispensation God has especially provided for their encouragement: he gave success to David, that "all the assembly of his people might know, that the Lord saveth not with sword and spear; for the battle is the Lord's[h]." In HIM must be our trust: in his strength must we go forth against our enemies: we must "be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might." We must arm ourselves with the weapons which he has provided; and though they appear to the eye of sense to be as useless as a sling and stone, yet shall they be made effectual through his power. Let us "take hope as our helmet, righteousness as our breast-plate, truth for our girdle, the Gospel of peace for our greaves, faith for our shield, and the word of God for our sword," and we need not fear either men or devils; for "He that is in us, is greater than he that is in the world," and "we shall be made more than conquerors through Him that loved us." Gird yourselves then to the battle, expecting "God to perfect his own strength in your weakness." Whoever, whether of friends or enemies, may attempt to divert you from your purpose, go forward; and remember,

[f] Eccl. viii. 11. [g] ver. 46. [h] ver. 47.

remember, that as the eyes of both the hostile armies were fixed on David and Goliath, so is there "a cloud of witnesses" anxiously observing you[i]. Oh, "quit yourselves like men," and soon you shall have cause to say, "Thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!"]

[i] Heb. xii. 1.

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## CCII.

### SAUL'S ENVY OF DAVID.

1 Sam. xviii. 9. *And Saul eyed David from that day and forward.*

THERE is not a baser principle in the human heart than envy. If we notice the connexion in which it is usually mentioned in the Scriptures, we shall see at once what an hateful disposition it is. St. Paul, speaking of the state of mankind by nature, says, they are "full of *envy*, murder, debate, deceit, malignity[a]:" and again, shewing what may be the state even of the Christian world, when distracted by contentions and disputes, he says, "lest there be debates, *envyings*, wraths, strifes, backbitings, whisperings, swellings, tumults[b]." In these two passages we behold it drawn to the very life; in the one, as restrained within certain limits by the mounds of a religious profession; and in the other, as breaking down every restraint, and inundating the whole man. For an illustration of it in all its most odious characters, we need look no further than to the passage before us; where Saul is represented as giving himself up entirely to its dominion. In order to set it before you in its true colours, we shall consider,

I. Its grounds—

[Envy is a grudging to another the possession of some good, which we ourselves affect: I say, of some *good*; for no man wishes *evil* to himself: the object therefore that excites the passion of envy, must be *good*. It need not indeed be really and intrinsically good; it is sufficient if it be good in the estimation of the person who beholds it. In Saul, envy was excited by the praises which were bestowed on David on account of his success against

[a] Rom. i. 29. [b] 2 Cor. xii. 20.

against Goliath: the women, whose office it was to celebrate great actions with songs and music, ascribed to David the honour of slaying myriads of his enemies, whilst they spoke of Saul as slaying only thousands. This mark of distinction was painful to the proud heart of Saul, who could not endure that another should be honoured above himself. It is precisely in the same way that envy is called forth by distinctions of every kind. Any endowments, whether natural or acquired, are sufficient to provoke this passion in the breasts of men. Beauty, courage, genius, though they be the gifts of nature, and therefore not any grounds of glorying to the persons who possess them, are yet greatly envied by those who wish to be admired for those qualities. In like manner, the attainments acquired by skill and diligence, together with the wealth or honour consequent upon those attainments, are objects which universally inflame this malignant passion. It must be observed, however, that this passion is called forth only where some degree of rivalry exists. A physician does not envy the triumphs of a warrior, or the success of a great lawyer; nor do *they*, on the other hand, envy *his* advancement to the summit of his profession: it is in their own line only, and towards those with whom there exists some kind of competition, that these feelings are excited: and it is by watching the motions of our hearts in reference to persons so circumstanced, that we shall detect the workings of this passion within us.

This passion may exist, not in individuals only, but in bodies of men; as, for instance, in schools, or colleges, or universities, or kingdoms: for, as every one may be said to possess a share of that honour which belongs to his own peculiar party, every one must feel an interest in exalting that party, and a proportionable degree of pain when its honours are eclipsed.

Strange as it may appear, religion itself may be made an occasion of bringing into exercise this vile passion: for though no envious person can delight in piety on its own account, he may desire the reputation attached to it, and consequently may envy him who really possesses it. What was it but Abel's superior piety, and the tokens of God's favour vouchsafed unto him, that instigated Cain to imbrue his hands in his blood? We are expressly told also, in the history before us, that when Saul saw that David behaved himself very wisely, and that God was with him, he feared and hated him the more[c]. And why was the Apostle Paul so hated and persecuted, not only by the avowed enemies of Christianity, but by many also who professed to reverence the Christian name? Was it not that his light shone more bright than that of others; and that the success of his labours was proportionably increased? Yes; it was owing to this that the Jews were filled with envy, when they saw the multitudes which sought to avail themselves of his instructions[d]; and that less popular

[c] ver. 12, 14, 15, 28, 29. [d] Acts xiii. 45. & xvii. 5.

popular Ministers in the Christian Church laboured to undermine his influence, "preaching Christ even of envy and strife," that by so doing they might draw over to themselves his converts, and so "add affliction to his bonds[e]."]

Having seen the grounds from whence it springs, let us next consider,

II. Its operations—

[In the history before us, as contained in this and the two following chapters, we behold this passion in as strong a point of view as it can well be placed. From the moment that Saul became enslaved by it, he was so blinded as not to behold the the excellence of David's character; so hardened as to be insensible to all the obligations which he, and the whole nation, owed to him: and so infatuated, as to seek incessantly his death. Repeatedly did he endeavour to destroy David with his spear. When he had failed in these attempts, he sought to ensnare David by engaging him to marry his eldest daughter, and then giving her to another; and afterwards by inducing him to expose his life to the sword of the Philistines in order to obtain his younger daughter in marriage. When he was disappointed in this also, he issued an order to Jonathan and to all his sons to kill David: and, when convinced of the injustice of this command, and pledged in a solemn oath to recede from his wicked purpose, he again renewed his attempts to murder him; and sought to gratify himself with seeing the murder effected, if not of perpetrating it with his own hand: and, when he did not succeed in that, he still pursued the fugitive to Naioth, where Samuel dwelt, sending different messengers, and at last going himself, to apprehend him; and even attempting to destroy Jonathan himself for pleading his cause.

Now we grant that such effects as these are very rare; for, in truth, very few have it in their power to pursue the object of their envy with such murderous and unrelenting rancour as Saul. But the *tendency* of this passion is the same in all: it produces in all a permanent aversion to the person, so that the very sight of him is painful, and occasions a desire, if possible, to bring him down to a level with ourselves. Like Saul, "we shall *eye* him from that day, and forward." His worth and excellence will be so far from pacifying our wrath, that it will rather augment it; and the brighter his character shines, the more shall we be offended at it. "Envy is" justly said to be "as rottenness in the bones[f]:" the disease lies deep; it creates uneasy sensations throughout the whole man; and is out of the reach of any common remedy. Though it may not operate so powerfully as to excite a desire to kill him that is the object of

[e] Phil. i. 15, 16. [f] Prov. xiv. 30.

of it, yet it invariably so affects the mind as to dispose us to detract from his merits, and to rejoice in his misfortunes. Nay more, we shall be ready, if not by overt act, yet at least by secret connivance, so to lower him in the estimation of others, as to prepare the way for the more easy exercise of their hostility towards him: and then shall rejoice in his fall, pleasing ourselves that it has been accomplished without any intervention on our part: and, if he be removed by death itself, it will excite the feeling of satisfaction rather than of pain and grief.

Well is this represented by Solomon as one of the greatest evils upon earth, and as stamping "vanity and vexation of spirit" upon all things here below, that "for a good work a man is envied of his neighbour[g]." For, however "cruel and outrageous wrath" may be, it may be withstood; but "who," says Solomon, "can stand before envy[h]?"]

Happy shall we be if, by any prescriptions we may offer, we may be enabled in any degree to promote,

III. Its cure—

No conduct on the part of those who are the objects of it can eradicate envy from the hearts of others. They may indeed put a veil, as it were, over their own virtues, so as to give less occasion for the exercise of envy; but nothing that they can do can prevent the disposition from being cherished by those around them. But we may all impede its influence over our own hearts;

1. By contemplating the vanity of earthly distinctions—

[How poor and empty are those vanities which men so greatly affect! The satisfaction arising from wealth or honour is far less than people generally imagine. Only let us reflect with what difficulty honours are obtained; with what pain and trouble they are often accompanied; how easily they are blasted; how little they can do for us under pain or sickness; and how soon they are terminated by death; and we shall see that they are unworthy the anxiety with which they are sought, or the regret with which they are lost. From such a view of them David exhorts us to look with indifference on the advancement of others, and to content ourselves with the pursuit of honours that shall never fade, and of happiness that shall never disappoint our most sanguine expectations[i] — — —]

2. By cultivating the knowledge of our own hearts—

[If

[g] Eccl. iv. 4. [h] Prov. xxvii. 4. [i] Ps. xxxvii. 1—4.

[If we envy others, it is from an idea that we ourselves deserve the honour that is conferred on them. But, if we knew the extent of our own demerit, as we are viewed by an holy God, we should rather account the lowest possible degree of honour above our desert; yea, we should rather be filled with wonder and with gratitude, that we are not held up as objects of execration and abhorrence. This would lead us willingly to "take the lowest place;" and consequently would lay the axe to the root of that accursed principle, which makes the elevation of others a ground of our own disquiet———]

3. By seeking a thorough conversion unto God—

[This alone will be attended with complete success. When the heart itself is renewed after the Divine image, these hateful qualities will be banished from it. Hence this is the prescription which the inspired writers give for the first removal of the disorder[k], and for the subsequent prevention of its return[l].]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who indulge this malignant spirit—

[The natural man is universally in a greater or less degree under its influence[m]: and, though lightly considered by the world at large, it is an evil which will exclude from heaven every person that is under its dominion[n]. O that the guilt and danger of it were more generally and more deeply considered!

But experience proves that even professors of religion may in a very awful degree be led captive by it. What shall we say of such? what, but that "they are carnal, and walk as men[o]?" Whence is it that so many dissentions and disputes arise in the Church of God, and are often carried to such a fearful extent? Is there nothing of this principle at work? Is not this "the root of bitterness that springs up and defiles them?" Yes: St. James gives us the true account, both of the principle itself, and of its operation in the Church: he tells us also, what will be the bitter consequence of yielding to its influence[p]. Let those who pretend to piety, look well to their own hearts, and tremble lest, while their voice is Jacob's voice, their hands be the hands of Esau." The true line of conduct for a Christian is that of Jonathan; who, knowing that he should be eclipsed by David, yet sought by all possible means to protect his person and advance his interests. Let Jonathan's character, as here portrayed, be contrasted with that of Saul, and be ever before our eyes for daily imitation———]

2. Those who are the objects of it—

[Marvel not, ye holy and circumspect Christians, if your characters

[k] Rom. xiii. 13, 14. [l] 1 Pet. ii. 1, 2. Prov. xxiii. 17. Gal. v. 16.
[m] Tit. iii. 3. Jam. iv. 5. [n] Gal. v. 20, 21.
[o] 1 Cor. iii. 3. [p] Jam. iii. 14—17.

characters be traduced by envy and detraction. "They that render evil for good will be against you, because you follow the thing that good is[q]." You must not expect to be treated better than your Lord and Master was. But study the character of David: see how meekly he bore his injuries: see how studiously he rendered good for evil: see how he "walked wisely before God in a perfect way." This is a conduct worthy to be followed, and shall assuredly bring with it an abundant recompence.]

[q] Ps. xxxviii. 20.

## CCIII.

### DAVID'S FEAR OF SAUL.

1 Sam. xx. 3. *Truly, as the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, there is but a step between me and death.*

IT is justly said, that "oppression maketh a wise man mad[a]." One there was, who endured it in every form, and to its utmost possible extent; and yet never uttered an unadvised word, or betrayed a temper which his bitterest enemies could condemn: Jesus, after years of persecution, could give this challenge to his enemies, "Which of you convinceth me of sin?" But fallen man, however upheld for a season, has generally betrayed his weakness when his trials have been heavy and of long continuance. We admire the conduct of David in many respects, and think him on the whole a very exalted character; but yet, on some occasions he fainted, and yielded to unworthy apprehensions respecting the final issue of his troubles. Such was the state of his mind when he uttered the words which we have just read; and which, though containing a general and acknowledged truth, were not such as he would have uttered, if he had not given way to desponding fears.

We shall consider the words in this two-fold view;

I. As a general and acknowledged truth—

The general representations which are given of life in the Scriptures, strongly mark its shortness and uncertainty—

[It

[a] Eccl. vii. 7.

[It is light, and unsubstantial in itself as "*a vapour*[b]:" its length is but as "*an hand-breadth*[c]:" the rapidity with which it passeth away is compared to "*a post*," in which the utmost possible dispatch is used; or to "*an eagle hasting to its prey*[d]." Such is its extreme vanity, that it is like "*a dream*[e]" or "*a shadow*[f]:" and so short does the whole of it in a retrospect appear, that it is "but *as yesterday* when it is past[g]." How justly then may it be said, that there is but a step between us and death!]

It must be regarded in that light by all persons without exception—

[Age or sickness may give some additional force to the expression in our text; but neither the youngest nor the most vigorous has any more certainty of life than the feeblest of mankind. Disease or accident may assault one as well as another; so that none can "boast of to-morrow; for we know not what a day may bring forth." So numerous indeed are the instances of persons removed suddenly, or in the very midst of life, that we cannot but acknowledge the truth and awfulness of the declaration before us.]

But, to obtain a just view of our text, we must regard it,

II. As an assertion arising out of the peculiar circumstances of David at that time—

[In this view it was the dictate of unbelief. We blame not David for using with all diligence the means of safety: for if he had neglected to use all just precautions under an expectation that God would fulfil his word at all events, he would have tempted God; just as our Saviour would have tempted him, if he had cast himself from the pinnacle of the Temple. But when God had assured him that he should possess the throne of Israel, and had actually confirmed the appointment by a sacred unction, it became David to give credit to the word of God, and to rest assured, that neither men nor devils should eventually disannul it. There was indeed such malignity in the heart of Saul, that nothing but Omnipotence could prevent the execution of his plots against David: but David should have known that "there is no might or power against the Lord," and that "the counsel of the Lord should surely stand:" and in the confidence of this, he should have been satisfied that Saul could not prevail against him. However just therefore his expressions were as applied to men in general, we cannot approve of them as applied to his own case: he should not have said, "I shall one day perish by the

[b] Jam. iv. 14. [c] Ps. xxxix. 5. [d] Job ix. 25, 26.
[e] Job xx. 8. [f] Ps. cii. 11. [g] Ps. xc. 3—6.

the hand of Saul[h]," but rather, "Since God is for me, who can be against me[i]."]

Having thus obtained a just and accurate view of the words before us, we may enter more largely into THE IMPROVEMENT which should be made of them. We may notice from them,

1. How frail the best of men are, when brought into heavy trials—

[On the whole, David's faith was remarkably strong: but here it failed; and, if it had not been strengthened from above, he would utterly have fainted. This he himself acknowledges, after he had recovered from this momentary depression[k]. It has justly been observed, that all the most eminent saints in Scripture have failed in that very grace for which they were most renowned: Abraham, the great pattern and example of faith, repeatedly denied his wife through unbelief: Moses, the meekest of the human race, "spake unadvisedly with his lips:" and Job, whose patience is proverbial, "cursed the day of his birth." Thus all have been left to shew, that their strength was not in themselves; that, if left, they were weak as other men; and that it is in God only that any just confidence can be placed: "He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool."

Let us bear this in mind, both for our humiliation and our encouragement. If we have been enabled to maintain a holy and consistent conduct, let us remember that it is "by the grace of God we are what we are;" and if we are tempted to look up to the saints of old as soaring to heights that can never be attained by us, let us remember, that the grace which wrought effectually for them, is equally sufficient for us; and that "we also can do all things through Christ strengthening us."]

2. What is the proper use and office of faith—

[Faith is not to supersede, but to encourage, our own endeavours, and to assure us of our successful termination of them. When to human appearance the difficulties are insurmountable, then is the season for faith to shew itself, and "against hope to believe in hope." This was the operation of Abraham's faith: he considered not the age of himself or of his wife, which precluded all hope of issue in the natural way, but expected that God would effect by miracle what could be effected in no other way. Doubting neither the power nor the veracity of God, he was willing to wait God's time, and confident that he should not be disappointed of his hope[l]. Had David's faith wrought thus on this occasion, it would have borne him up amidst the waves of trouble that rolled over him in quick succession.

This

[h] Ch. xxvii. 1.
[i] Rom. viii. 31.
[k] Ps. xxvii. 1, 3, 5, 13.
[l] Rom. iv. 20, 21. & Heb. xi. 17, 19.

This then is what we recommend to all. Are you bowed down with a sense of guilt? Lay hold on that promise, that "Christ will in no wise cast out any who come unto him." Are you assaulted with grievous temptations? Remember who has said, that "you shall not be tempted above that ye are able, but that you shall have a way to escape, or be enabled to bear it." Do your corruptions appear invincible? Rely on Him who has said, "My grace is sufficient for you." And, if your troubles are of such a magnitude as to menace your immediate destruction, rest yourselves on the promise of Jehovah, that "all things shall work together for your good." Be satisfied that "He is faithful who hath promised," and that "not a jot or tittle of His word can fail."]

3. What is the wisdom of every child of man—

[None of us have any such warrant to expect a continuance of life as David had; and therefore his observation respecting the shortness and uncertainty of life should be admitted in its utmost force. Ignorant then as we are whether the very next step may not carry us into the eternal world, we ought to inquire with ourselves, Whether it would take us to heaven or to hell? O what a thought is this! What madness is it not to dwell upon it more than we do, or to delay for a moment our preparation for the eternal state! We would call on all of you; *the aged*, who know for a certainty that their time cannot be long; *the sick*, who are warned by the disorders that are yet upon them; *the young*, who are in the prime and vigour of life; we would intreat all without exception to stand ready for death and judgment. O beloved, "prepare to meet your God." Think of the multitudes that have been summoned to his tribunal unprepared; and be thankful that there is yet one step between you and death. The Lord grant that, whenever that step be taken, you have an abundant entrance into the realms of bliss[m].]

[m] Mark xiii. 33—37.

## CCIV.

### DAVID'S FORBEARANCE TOWARDS SAUL.

1 Sam. xxiv. 4—6. *And the men of David said unto him, Behold the day of which the Lord said unto thee, Behold, I will deliver thine enemy into thine hand, that thou mayest do to him as it shall seem good unto thee. Then David arose, and cut off the skirt of Saul's robe privily. And it came to pass afterward, that David's heart smote him, because he had cut off Saul's skirt. And he said unto his men, The Lord forbid that I should do this thing unto my master, the Lord's anointed, to stretch forth mine hand against him, seeing he is the anointed of the Lord.*

KNOWING

KNOWING what we do of the depravity of human nature, we should scarcely conceive that men could attain to such heights of virtue as are recorded in the holy Scriptures, if we did not know that those records are of Divine authority. This observation is verified in the history of Abraham, of Moses, and of David also, who, though a very faulty character in some respects, was in other respects a star of the first magnitude. We are called on the present occasion to notice his conduct towards Saul; and to consider him under a three-fold relation;

I. As a subject towards his prince—

[Never had man more just occasion to withstand his prince than he: the inveteracy with which Saul laboured to destroy him was incessant[a]——— Yet how did David act towards him? God had now placed Saul within his power; (for Saul lay down to sleep in a cave where David and his men were concealed:) but David would not touch him: yea, though importuned by his own men, and urged to consider Saul's exposed situation as an indication of the Divine pleasure, he not only would not smite Saul with his own hand, but would not suffer any one else to smite him: and even when, for the fuller discovery of his own innocence, he had cut off the skirt of Saul's robe, his conscience smote him as having offered an indignity to his prince: so tenderly did he regard not only the life, but the honour also, of his prince.

In this he was a pattern to all succeeding ages: for though the different Governments of the world give different degrees of power to the supreme Magistrate, and of liberty to the subjects, yet in every country under heaven must the Magistrate be considered as God's representative on earth, and must be "obeyed, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake[b]"——— Under circumstances of an unfavourable nature, there should be a readiness in us to palliate, rather than to expose and aggravate, his misconduct; and a willingness rather to submit to evils, than by violent resistance to endanger the welfare of the community. The character of Christian subjects is, that they are "the quiet in the land."]

II. As a saint towards his oppressor—

[The injuries done to David were really "for righteousness sake." Like Jesus, of whom he was an eminent type, "he was hated without a cause." This consideration must have added tenfold poignancy to all his afflictions. To be conscious that he was

[a] See the three preceding chapters. [b] Rom. xiii. 1, 2, 5.

was continually labouring to cut off all occasional offence, and yet to find himself persecuted with unrelenting fury, was most distressing to his mind. Yet, as Saul himself confessed, he returned nothing but good for evil[c].

But such is the true line of every Christian's duty. We should "not render evil for evil to any man[d]," but rather love our enemies, and do them good[e]. This is the true way to soften the hearts of our enemies, and to insure a final victory over them[f]———]

## III. As a Believer towards his God—

[As to avenging himself, David knew that God was the Judge of all, and would in due time vindicate his righteous cause, and punish his unrighteous oppressor: to God therefore he left, what belonged to God alone[g]. Moreover, though God had promised him the kingdom, he left God to fulfil his promise in his own time and way. Doubtless he felt great distress of mind under all his trials; but he committed himself to God in prayer, and looked for deliverance from him alone[h].

Thus, however great and complicated our trials be, we should take no hasty step[i], but "commit ourselves to God as a faithful Creator[k]," and expect assuredly the final accomplishment of all his promises[l]———]

[c] ver. 17. [d] 1 Thess. v. 14. [e] Matt. v. 44.
[f] Compare ver. 16. with Rom. xii. 20, 21. [g] ver. 15.
[h] The 57th Psalm was written on this very occasion. See the title, and ver. 1—6. In ver. 6. he seems to refer to the very event in our text: Saul came to destroy David, and inadvertently exposed himself to be destroyed by David.
[i] Isai. xxviii. 16. [k] 1 Pet. iv. 19. [l] Ps. xxxvii. 5, 6.

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## CCV.

### DAVID KEPT FROM AVENGING HIMSELF ON NABAL.

1 Sam. xxv. 32, 33. *And David said to Abigail, Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, which sent thee this day to meet me! and blessed be thy advice, and blessed be thou, which hast kept me this day from coming to shed blood, and from avenging myself with mine own hand!*

THE fidelity of the sacred historians is observable in every part of the Divine records. A partial friend, or a person who was unduly concerned about the honour of religion, would have cast a veil over the facts which are contained in this chapter. They are, it must be confessed, extremely humiliating, and

and constrain us to exclaim, "Lord, what is man!" In the general we behold "the man after God's heart" acting with a holy consistency, and meriting the character of a most exalted saint: but here we see him rushing to commit the most horrid iniquities, and restrained only by the special intervention of God's providence.

In contemplating the history before us, we shall see,

I. What evils men would commit if left to themselves—

We wonder not at the churlishness of Nabal: such characters are common; men, who, in point of temper, are "such sons of Belial, that a man cannot even speak to them[a];" and whose every act contrains you to associate with their names the idea of folly[b]. They are worthless in themselves, yet contemptuous towards others: they are profuse and intemperate in convivial entertainments, but hard-hearted and niggardly in reference to the indigent and distressed. But,

We are amazed at the cruel resentment of David—

[The provocation which he had received was certainly great. He had been the greatest benefactor to his country. He was persecuted only for righteousness sake. Though driven to great straits, he had never suffered his soldiers to relieve his wants by plunder. He had afforded a protection to Nabal's property and servants, without any remuneration whatever. He was peculiarly in want of necessary provisions at this time: and from the preparations which Nabal had made for his feast he might have been supplied without any material inconvenience. His message to Nabal was most courteous and kind: yet was Nabal's answer insolent in the extreme.

This however did not justify such fierce resentment as David manifested. He might justly have complained of Nabal; perhaps in his circumstances he might have been justified in demanding as a right what had been refused him as a gift: but to think of murdering Nabal, of murdering also every male belonging to him, was as atrocious a design as ever entered into the heart of man. Who would have conceived that such a thought should ever enter into the mind of him, who had so recently spared his most malignant enemy, and had been condemned in his

[a] ver. 17. [b] ver. 25.

his own conscience for even cutting off the skirt of his master's garment?]

It shews however what corruption there is in the human heart—

[Truly the heart of man is "desperately wicked." Even though renewed by Divine grace, we are no longer able to stand, than whilst we are upheld by God himself. However long we may have persevered in holy obedience, we are yet liable to fall; and however great the temptations which we have withstood in times past, we have no security but that we may be overcome by the smallest. Yea, there is nothing so vile, but we may be led to commit it, if we be not every moment strengthened from on high. Who can contemplate the fall of Noah after his deliverance from the Deluge, and of Lot after his exemplary piety in Sodom, and not tremble for himself, lest he be overcome in an unguarded hour? "Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall."]

The subject further leads us to notice,

II. How much we owe to God for his providential restraints—

David expresses his obligations to God for delivering him from this temptation.

[A servant of Nabal, fearing the effects of his master's message, informed his mistress of the whole transaction; bearing testimony at the same time to the kindness and integrity of David's conduct: and Abigail immediately adopted the most prudent methods of pacifying David's resentment. Without loss of time she took a liberal portion of the provisions that had been prepared for the feast, and went with them herself to meet David. Happily she met David in the way; and by her consummate address completely disarmed his wrath, and averted the calamity which would have speedily ruined her whole family. Instantly David recognized in her the Divine interposition; and, whilst he blessed her for her advice, he blessed God for sending her to obstruct his bloody and vindictive purposes. It is worthy of observation, that David took scarce any notice of her liberality which supplied his present wants, but fixed his whole attention on the deliverance which he had experienced from his own relentless fury: and well might he bless God for that interposition, whereby he was preserved from the blackest crime he could have perpetrated, and possibly too from the penal consequences of it to all eternity.]

And have not *we* also reason to adore our God for similar restraints?

[Let

[Let us reflect on our past experience, even in relation to revenge. Have we never had our minds so irritated and inflamed, as to feel a readiness to avenge ourselves? And are we sure, that if a murderous instrument had been at hand, we should not have used it? Have not others yielded to that temptation, who were to all appearance as little exposed to it as we: and can we be certain that a little further provocation would not have produced the same effect on us?

But let us inquire also in reference to other sins. Have criminal desires never risen so strong in our hearts, that we have owed it rather to some providential restraints, than to our own abhorrence of iniquity, that they were not actually fulfilled? We have witnessed often enough the falls of others: and to whom must we ascribe it if we ourselves have not fallen in like manner? Must we not say with the prophet, "Thou Lord hast wrought all our works in us[c]?" Truly, if we would call to mind the various temptations which we have at any time experienced, and the various methods which God has used for our deliverance, we should behold such evidences of his paternal care, as would fill our hearts with wonder, and our mouths with praise.]

Such are the reflections arising from a *general* view of our subject. From a more *particular* inspection of it we may LEARN,

1. What a dreadful evil is revenge—

[There is nothing so cruel, but a vindictive spirit will impel us to it. Whilst under the influence of revenge, we overlook all consequences: we think nothing of the misery which we may entail on persons that are innocent. David was not content with murdering Nabal, but would murder also every male belonging to him, though not one of them was a partaker of Nabal's fault. Thus the incendiary, or the duellist, contemplates not for a moment the miseries he may inflict on others; the welfare of a whole nation would be of no account in his eyes, when compared with the gratification of his revenge[d]. O let us guard against the first risings of this malignant passion[e]! let us bear in mind, that vengeance is not our prerogative, but God's[f]: and let us seek rather that noblest of all victories, "the overcoming of evil with good[g]."]

2. What a blessing is a faithful monitor—

[David could scarcely express the obligation he felt to Abigail for her heavenly counsel[h]. And what reason have *we* to be

[c] Isai. xxvi. 12.

[d] Preached on May 14th, being three days after Mr. Perceval's assassination.

[e] Prov. xix. 11.

[f] Rom. xii. 19.

[g] Prov. xxiv. 29. & xxv. 21, 22.

[h] *Thrice* he blesses her, and God for her.

be thankful for the instructions of our parents, the counsels of our friends, and the admonitions of our Ministers! We shall never know from what evils we have been preserved by them, till the whole book of God's remembrance shall be opened to us. In the same light we may view those various circumstances of our life which may have appeared most calamitous. The loss of our health or property may have been thought afflictive at the time; but who can tell what he might have perpetrated, if these messengers of mercy had not been sent to arrest him in his course? Let us then receive as from the Lord all those persons or events, which may lead us to reflection. Let us in particular be thankful for reproof; and bear in mind, that almost any other person is a more competent judge of the propriety of our conduct, than we ourselves can be under the impulse of any strong passion. If our friend possess the wisdom and address of Abigail, let us value him the more; but, if not, let his advice be nevertheless welcome to our minds; and let him be highly esteemed by us in proportion to his fidelity[i].]

3. What need have we all to pray against temptation—

[We may, like David, have withstood the greatest trials, and yet fall, like him, by those which are comparatively light. We are far from being at all times alike. We have not a stock of grace at our own command: it is not the light of one hour, or of one minute, that will suffice for the next; nor is it any measure of grace already received, that will enable us to stand fast in the Lord. We must receive fresh communications every moment, and look continually to the Lord for guidance and support. Let us then beg of God to "hedge up our way with thorns[k];" and, if preserved by him from falling, let us acknowledge him as the only source of our stability[l].]

[i] Prov. ix. 8, 9. & xxv. 12. & xxviii. 23.
[k] Hos. ii. 6, 7. [l] Ps. xxvi. 12. & xli. 12, 13.

## CCVI.

### THE WITCH OF ENDOR.

1 Sam. xxviii. 15. *And Samuel said to Saul, Why hast thou disquieted me, to bring me up? And Saul answered, I am sore distressed; for the Philistines make war against me, and God is departed from me, and answereth me no more, neither by prophets nor by dreams: therefore I have called thee, that thou mayest make known to me what I shall do.*

THAT such a thing as witchcraft has existed, we cannot doubt: but what were the incantations used, or what power Satan had to work with and by them, we

we know not. Certain it is, that in the days of our Lord, Satan appears to have had a greater influence over the bodies of men than he possesses at this time: and as that was permitted of God for the more abundant display of Christ's power, so it is probable that an extraordinary influence over the minds of men may, through the Divine permission, have been sometimes exerted by Satan, that the evil tendency of that influence might be the more clearly seen, and the excellence of the Divine government be more justly appreciated. As for the various instances of witchcraft recorded in uninspired books, we can place no dependence whatever upon them; because there is often an undue degree of credulity even in great and good men, and a readiness to receive any report that is marvellous, without sufficiently examining the grounds on which it stands. But what is recorded in the Scriptures we may well believe; because it is revealed by One who cannot err. The account given us of the Witch of Endor is one of the most remarkable in the Scriptures; though there are in it some difficulties, which have occasioned a diversity of opinions among the learned respecting it. That however we may place it before you in an easy and instructive point of view, we shall consider the history of Saul connected with it; and particularly,

I. The state to which he was reduced—

This he himself specifies in the words of our text—

[Long and obstinately had he continued to sin against the convictions of his own conscience; till at last he had provoked God to depart from him. Whilst he was forsaken of his God, the Philistines made war against him, and invaded the land. Then he felt the need of an Almighty Protector, and sought to obtain direction and help from his offended God. But now God would not be found of him, or take any notice of his supplications. In various ways had God been wont to communicate his mind; but now he would return "no answer, either by Urim, or by a prophet, or by a dream."]

Such, alas! is but too frequently the state of ungodly men—

[Many there are who violate habitually the dictates of their own conscience, till they "vex," and "grieve the Holy Spirit," and utterly "quench" his sacred motions. No wonder if at such times trouble come upon them: for indeed the whole creation are ready to "avenge the quarrel of God's covenant," whensoever he shall withdraw from us his protecting hand: and whatever our trials be, or from whatever quarter they come, they will be incomparably heavier, from the consciousness that "God himself is become our enemy." Under their trials the most hardened of men will begin to relent, and will "pour out a prayer when God's chastening is upon them"——— "When God slays them, then they will seek him," as the Psalmist says. But at such seasons they are often made to feel what "an evil and bitter thing it is to forsake the Lord." They call upon God, but "he will not hear them, because their hands are full of sin[a]:" yea, he even "laughs at their calamity, and mocks when their fear cometh[b]." He has repeatedly declared, that thus he would treat all who should "set up idols in their hearts[c]:" and melancholy indeed is their state, who have no access to God in their troubles, nor any communications from him for their support. Yet we can have but little acquaintance with the house of mourning, if we have not met with many such cases in the world.]

Such was the unhappy state of Saul. Let us next proceed to notice,

II. The expedient to which he resorted—

Now he wished for the counsel of that Minister, whom when living he neglected and despised;—and

To obtain an interview with Samuel, he had recourse to a witch—

[In former days Saul had exerted himself, agreeably to God's command[d], to banish witchcraft from the land; and now could not prevail on this woman to use her inchantments, till he had profanely sworn that no punishment should be inflicted on her. At his earnest intreaty, she prevailed to bring up Samuel before him. Many learned men have thought that Samuel himself did not appear, but that Satan assumed his shape and garb. But there is no intimation in the history that this was the case; on the contrary, every expression has directly the opposite aspect: and it seems that even the witch herself was beyond measure astonished at the unexpected success of her incantation. It is urged on the other hand, that a witch could never prevail to bring Samuel from the grave, or his soul from the mansions of the

[a] Isai. i. 15. [b] Prov. i. 26—28.
[c] Ezek. xiv. 1—7. & xx. 1—3. with Ps. lxvi. 18.
[d] Lev. xx. 27.

the blessed. True; but God might see fit to send Samuel on this occasion, to confirm all the threatenings which he had denounced when living: nor is there any weight in the objection, that he speaks of being "disquieted," and "brought *up*," because this was only popular language suited to the prevailing notions of the day: and when he speaks of Saul and his sons being "*with him* on the morrow," he can only mean, that they should be removed into the invisible world by death——— It seems clear, that, as God afterwards sent a living prophet to reprove Amaziah's application to the heathen idol, so now he sent a departed prophet to reprove in Saul a similar offence[e].

But what availed this interview with Samuel? Samuel himself put the question to Saul, "Wherefore dost thou ask of me, seeing the Lord is departed from thee, and is become thine enemy?" Vain indeed was that hope which sought in a broken cistern what the fountain alone could supply.]

And equally vain are those refuges to which sinners flee, when they are forsaken by their God—

[Men in a time of trouble will catch at any thing for comfort. Some will endeavour to drown reflection in the cares or pleasures of the world; whilst others take refuge in infidelity: but not even Saul's expedient was more vain than these: for what is there either in business or pleasure to satisfy a guilty conscience? or what can infidelity adduce to disprove the truths which it would set aside? "In uttering error against the Lord, we only make empty the soul of the hungry, and cause the drink of the thirsty to fail[f]"——— Such are the expedients, whatever they may be, whereby we labour to supply the place of an offended God———]

From the close of the history we learn,

III. The misery he brought upon his own soul—

Great indeed were his disappointment and distress—

[Behold the melancholy train; dejection, desperation, suicide! He fainted and fell as soon as ever he heard the fate that awaited him: and was with great difficulty persuaded to take such refreshment as was necessary for his support. But no humiliation of soul did he manifest; nor, as far as we see, did he present to God one single petition. He sank down in sullen desperation, determining to meet his fate, but using no effort to obtain mercy at the hands of God. The battle terminated according to the word of Samuel; and Saul himself, to prevent the mortification

[e] Compare 2 Kin. i. 1—6. where the cases, and *the issue of them*, are a good deal alike.

[f] Isai. xxxii. 6.

mortification of falling alive into the hands of his enemies, fell upon his own sword, and put a period to his own existence[g].]

But such are generally the effects of seeking in the creature what can be found in God alone—

[Many are oppressed with great dejection of mind: but if they would search out the causes of their trouble, they would find it generally to spring from lusts unmortified, and iniquities unrepented of. And how often does dejection lead to despair! Strange as it may seem, it is easier to abandon oneself to an hopeless despondency, than to renounce beloved sins, and persevere in an earnest inquiry after God. Yes; the heart, instead of relenting, is more generally "hardened through the deceitfulness of sin;" and when we begin to say "There is no hope," then we add, "I have loved idols, and after them will I go." The close of all is, in too many cases, suicide: men finding no relief in God, fly to death itself as the only remedy for the troubles of life. Ah! unhappy men, who venture thus to rush into the presence of that God, who has hid his face from them!]

Let us LEARN then to BEWARE,

1. Of impenitence in sin—

[Many who, like Saul, have been hopeful in their beginnings, fall from one sin to another, till they set both God and conscience at defiance. But however sweet sin may be in the mouth, it will prove as gall in the stomach. It will destroy all peace of mind, all hope in God, all prospect in eternity. O let it not be harboured in our hearts! Whatever our besetting sin be, let us never rest till we have repented of it, and washed it away in the Redeemer's blood, and obtained the victory over it through the power and grace of God. If not purged out, it will defile and destroy our whole souls.]

2. Of seeking help in the creature—

[God is the only refuge of sinful man: wherever we may look, there is no help for us in any other. Not only are men and devils unable to assist us; even all the angels in heaven would be incapable of affording us any effectual help. Whatever creature we rest upon, it will prove only "as a broken reed, which will pierce the hand that rests upon it." We must learn in every difficulty to say with Jehosaphat, "Lord, I have no power against this great company that cometh against me, neither know I what to do; but mine eyes are upon Thee[h]."]

3. Of giving way to despondency—

[To despair, is to seal our own condemnation. We must never conclude, that, because God has forsaken us, "he will be no

[g] 1 Sam. xxxi. 4. [h] 2 Chron. xx. 12.

no more intreated." Had Saul himself truly and unfeignedly implored mercy at his hands, God would not have utterly cast him off. "God never did, nor ever will, say to any, Seek ye my face in vain[i]."]

[i] Judg. x. 10—16.

## CCVII.

### THE DEATH OF ABNER.

2 Sam, iii. 31—34. *And David said to Joab, and to all the people that were with him, Rend your clothes, and gird you with sackcloth, and mourn before Abner. And king David himself followed the bier. And they buried Abner in Hebron: and the king lift up his voice and wept at the grave of Abner: and all the people wept. And the king lamented over Abner, and said, Died Abner as a fool dieth? Thy hands were not bound, nor thy feet put into fetters: as a man falleth before wicked men, so fellest thou. And all the people wept again over him.*

AFTER the death of Saul, David was anointed king in Hebron: but still he reigned over one tribe only; for Abner had prevailed on the other eleven tribes to adhere still to the house of Saul, and to make Ishbosheth, the son of Saul, their king. From the disinterestedness and forbearance which David manifested during all the persecutions which he experienced from Saul, we can have no doubt but that he would have rested satisfied with the government of one tribe, till God in his providence should open the way for the full possession of the throne of Israel: but Ishbosheth and his adherents accounted David an usurper, and therefore waged incessant war with him for seven years[k]. At last however a circumstance occurred, which seemed likely to effect the promised union of all the tribes under David as their head. Ishbosheth had offended Abner by accusing him of illicit intercourse with a concubine of Saul: and Abner, filled with resentment, determined to transfer his allegiance to David, and to carry over all the eleven tribes with him. Ishbosheth, knowing

[k] Ch. ii. 10, 11. with Ch. iii. 1.

knowing that Abner's influence would effect this measure, acquiesced in it, and submitted to the terms prescribed by David as a preliminary to the league which should be made between them: he sent and took Michal, Saul's daughter, from Phaltiel her husband, and gave her up to David, from whom she had been wrongfully withheld. Every thing was now ready to be carried into execution: Abner had succeeded in his conference with David, and nothing remained but to bring over the heads of the eleven tribes to the plan proposed. But behold, the treachery of Joab defeated and destroyed the plan. Joab, just returned from an expedition against the Philistines, heard what Abner had done; and immediately expostulated with David on his credulity, for suffering Abner so to impose upon him: and then, sending privately in David's name to Abner, as though some further communication with him was wanted, he met Abner on his return, and took him aside, and slew him.

This murderous act of Joab's, together with its attendant circumstances, will furnish us with some very useful, and, at this time, seasonable[b], observations.

We observe then,

I. That there is no crime so atrocious, but a person under the influence of a vindictive spirit will commit it—

[Revenge was the principle from which Joab, in concert with his brother Abishai, acted on this occasion[c]: Abner had slain their brother Asahel; and they sought to avenge his death. But if they had candidly considered, they might have found in this matter an occasion for gratitude rather than resentment: for Abner had exercised towards Asahel a forbearance and tenderness that could not reasonably have been expected; nor had lifted up a hand against him till the last extremity[d]. They were blinded however by their own passion, and overlooked every thing for the gratification of it. Joab never once reflected on the baseness of the action he was about to perpetrate, nor on the loss which David

[b] Just after the assassination of Mr. Perceval, before the presenting to the Prince Regent the Address from Cambridge.

[c] ver. 27, 30. [d] Ch. ii. 20—23.

David and the whole nation would sustain, nor on the account which he should one day give of it to God; but with horrid treachery, and deliberate cruelty, plunged the dagger into the side of Abner.

Alas! alas! how awfully has this scene been renewed amongst us! It was no political animosity, but revenge alone, that instigated the murderer to the commission of his crime. Under the influence of that infernal passion he proceeded in the most deliberate manner to execute his cruel purpose. Thoughts of mercy and compassion found no place in his bosom. The injury that would be done to a fellow-creature, (who would, in one instant, be hurried into the presence of his God;) the bereavement that would be felt by all his family, and the loss that would be sustained by the whole nation, (a loss to all appearance irreparable;) seemed to him as nothing, when weighed against the gratifications of revenge: nay, the thought of his own account that he should have to give at the judgment-seat of Christ could interpose no bar to the execution of his design. Yea, after the perpetration of the deed, he justified his act, and, like Joab, continued impenitent to his dying hour.

Ah! what an evil is revenge! What need have we to guard against the very thought of it rising in our hearts! Truly, we know not to what an extent the inundation may reach, when once the smallest breach is made in the dam that obstructs this current[e].]

We all are called upon at this time to mourn on the sad occasion: for it is certain,

II. That the crimes of individuals will be imputed to us as national, if they be not nationally reprobated and deplored—

[Of this David was aware; and therefore he endeavoured to avert the guilt from the nation, by calling on them all to humble themselves before God, and to express in penitential sorrow their abhorrence of the crime[f]. On this occasion he himself set them the example: he mourned, he wept, he fasted: he followed the corpse to the grave: he poured out the most pathetic lamentations over it; reflecting with just severity on the atrocity of the crime; and lamenting that he had not power to inflict punishment on the offenders[g]: and it was greatly to the honour of his people that they participated so deeply in his affliction. All approbation of the crime was thus formally disavowed; and the guilt of it was made to rest on him who had committed it.

We rejoice that an universal abhorrence of the assassination has been expressed in our land: or, if there have been any so abandoned to all sense of duty both to God and man as to approve

[e] Prov. xvii. 14. [f] ver. 28, 29, 31. [g] ver. 33, 34, 35, 39.

approve the deed, they have made themselves partakers of the crime, and contracted in the sight of God the guilt of murder. We would however remind you all, that this should be a season of deep humiliation amongst us, and of earnest prayer. We must mourn over the deed, and wash our hands in the blood of our great Sacrifice, if we would not have the guilt of blood imputed to us, or visited upon our land[h].]

It is some consolation to us however to consider,

III. That whatever obstructions arise, God's purposes shall surely be accomplished—

[The establishment of David on the throne of Israel was now nearly completed; yet in the very moment of its completion, as it were, was it counteracted by this horrid crime; the influence that was to accomplish the measure, was destroyed; and the rival monarch deterred from his purpose. No prospect now remained but that of continued war: and the very counsels of Heaven appeared to have been defeated. But God's counsel shall stand, though the expected instrument of its accomplishment be taken out of the way, and the greatest obstacle to its accomplishment remain. Accordingly in an unlooked-for way the point was affected, and the promise made fifteen years before to David, was fulfilled.

We did hope, that by the elevation of him, whose loss we deplore, to the government of this country, God had designs of mercy toward us: and we have reason to adore our God for the benefits which through his instrumentality our nation has received. Such a character, all things considered, has rarely been seen at the head of our affairs; for piety is but a rare associate with political power. But, if the channel of God's mercy is withdrawn, the fountain still is full; and if we plead with him to pour out his benefits upon us, he will yet find other channels through which to communicate them to our land. True it is, that this is a season of uncommon difficulty, and the political horizon is gloomy in the extreme[i]: but we hope that our nation shall yet be preserved a blessing to the world; and that all the efforts which are making for the enlarging of our Redeemer's kingdom, and which were sanctioned and aided by him whom we have lost, will yet be honoured with success. "The wall is to be built in troublous times:" "the kingdoms of the world shall become the kingdom of the Lord and of his Christ:" and, though darkness should yet increase upon us, we hope and trust that "in the evening time it shall be light."]

But though God's counsel shall stand, we are not the

[h] Deut. xxi. 1—9.

[i] No person being found to take the lead in our Government; and new difficulties arising, by means of Russia being just about to be again involved in war with France.

the less accountable to him for our actions; nor can we doubt but,

IV. That however men may escape punishment in this world, their sins shall be recompensed in the world to come—

[To that tribunal David looked forward, when he found that "the sons of Zeruiah were too hard for him;" and he found consolation in the thought, that "the Lord would reward the doer according to his wickedness[k]." It was a misfortune to him to have a subject so powerful, that he could set the laws at defiance. Through the goodness of God, the laws of our land are enforced; and the atrocious act that has been committed has met with its deserved recompence. But there are sins of a less heinous nature, which are committed daily with impunity. Let us not however suppose that they will be unnoticed by the Judge of quick and dead. The vindictive thought will there be noticed, as well as the vindictive act; yea, and the impure desire also, as well as adultery itself: for God will bring into judgment every secret thing, whether it be good or evil. Nor will there be any respect of persons with him. *Now* there is a kind of partiality in favour of the rich and great; evils are allowed in them, which, if committed by persons of the lower class, would be reprobated and abhorred: but the high and the low will hereafter be equally tried by the unerring standard of God's law, and be judged "according to what they have done in the body, whether it be good or evil." Let not the hope of impunity therefore encourage any man to sin; for God has warned us, that "though hand join in hand," (yea, though earth and hell should unite for the protection of any,) "the wicked shall not pass unpunished."]

[k] ver. 39.

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## CCVIII.

### UZZAH'S PUNISHMENT FOR TOUCHING THE ARK.

2 Sam. vi. 6—9. *And when they came to Nachon's threshing-floor, Uzzah put forth his hand to the ark of God, and took hold of it; for the oxen shook it. And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Uzzah; and God smote him there for his error: and there he died, by the ark of God. And David was displeased because the Lord had made a breach upon Uzzah: and he called the name of the place Perez-uzzah to this day. And David was afraid of the Lord that day, and said, How shall the ark of the Lord come to me?*

THE

THE noblest use of power is to exert it for God. So David thought: for no sooner had he attained the quiet possession of the throne of Israel, than he determined to bring up the ark of God from Kirjath-jearim, where it had remained in obscurity perhaps for seventy years, and to place it in Jerusalem, where it might receive the honour due unto it. But, as persons striving in the Grecian games "were not crowned except they strove lawfully," and conformed to the rules prescribed for them, so neither can *they* be accepted who exert their influence for God, except they use it agreeably to the dictates of His revealed will. Accordingly in this very act David met with a repulse: the person whom he employed to bring up the ark was struck dead upon the spot; and the whole measure was disconcerted: yea the very frame of David's mind also was changed, from joyous exultation, to vexation, sorrow, and despondency.

Let us contemplate,

I. The punishment inflicted on Uzzah—

Uzzah and Ahio, sons of Abinadab, having long had the charge of the ark in their father's house, undertook to drive the cart whereon it was to be conveyed to Jerusalem. Ahio went before to prepare the way, and Uzzah drove the oxen: but, when they were arrived at the threshing-floor of Nachon, the oxen by some means shook the ark; and Uzzah apprehensive it would fall, put forth his hand to keep it steady: and for this offence he was struck dead upon the spot.

Now at first sight it appears as if this punishment was exceedingly disproportionate to the offence: but we shall be of a very different opinion, if we consider,

1. The offence committed—

[This was of a complicated nature: it was the offence, not of Uzzah only, but of David, and of the whole nation. As it related to Uzzah, it was highly criminal: for God, in the orders he had given respecting the removal of the ark from place to place, had directed that *the priests only* should *touch* the ark, or any

any thing belonging to it; and that the Levites should carry it: and so strict was this order, that it was enforced by the penalty of death: "The sons of Kohath shall *bear* it (by its long staves;) but they shall not *touch* any holy thing, *lest they* die[a]." Now Uzzah was not a priest; and therefore he should on no account have presumed to touch the ark. It may well be supposed, that this violation of God's command was the fruit of an habitual irreverence, which a long familiarity with the ark had nourished in his mind: and therefore God took this occasion of punishing his presumption.

But David, also, and all the nation were to blame: for the very accident that occasioned Uzzah to put forth his hand, arose from their criminal neglect. God had given plain directions about his ark; and had ordered that it should be carried *on the shoulders of the Levites*. The other articles belonging to the tabernacle were large and cumbersome; and for the conveyance of them God had given waggons and oxen; but "to the sons of Kohath he had given none; because the service belonging to them was, to bear the ark upon their shoulders[b]." Why then was this forgotten? Why did David and all the priests and people presume to substitute another way, different from that which God had prescribed? The Philistines, it is true, had sent home the ark in this way: but they knew nothing of the directions given in the law, nor had they any of the sons of Aaron with them to employ in that service. Were these ignorant heathens a fit pattern for David to follow, in direct opposition to the commands of God? If David did not know what God had commanded in relation to the ark, should he not have examined; or should he not have inquired of the Lord, as he had so recently and so successfully done in reference to his conflicts with the Philistines? This neglect then was highly criminal, and justly merited the rebuke it met with.]

2. The reason of noticing it with such severity—

[Besides the enormity of the offence, there was additional reason for punishing it with severity, arising out of the very nature of that dispensation. God had shewn himself so gracious and condescending towards that nation, that there was great danger lest they should entertain erroneous notions of his character, and overlook entirely his majesty and greatness. Indeed even his condescension itself would be undervalued, unless they should be made sensible of his justice, his holiness, and his power. Hence on many occasions He had taken care to blend some displays of his power with the manifestations of his love. When he came down upon Mount Sinai to give them his law, he accompanied the revelation with awful demonstrations of his greatness. When he had sent fire from heaven to consume the sacrifices

[a] Numb. iv. 15. [b] Numb. vii. 6—9.

sacrifices on his altar, and to declare his acceptance of them, he destroyed Nadab and Abihu by fire for presuming to burn incense before him with fire different from that which he had kindled[c]. When a single individual in the nation had offended him, he withdrew his protection from all, till the person was discovered and put to death[d]. Thus, he was now suffering the symbols of his presence to be transported to Jerusalem; and the people would be ready to think that they had conferred an honour upon him: he therefore shewed them, that no service could be accepted of him, unless it were regulated by a strict adherence to his revealed will; and that whilst they received from him such signal tokens of his favour, they must at the peril of their souls conduct themselves towards him with the profoundest reverence[e]. In this view the judgment inflicted upon Uzzah was an instructive lesson to the whole nation, and is a standing proof that "God is greatly to be feared, and to be had in reverence of all them that are round about him[f]."]

We lament however to observe,

II. The effect it produced on the mind of David—

Truly the best of men are but weak, when they are visited with any heavy trial. Fervent as David's mind was, no sooner was he thus rebuked than he was filled,

1. With proud resentment—

[It is probable that there was in his mind an undue degree of complacency, from the idea that he was the honoured instrument of thus exalting and glorifying his God. To meet therefore with such a check, in the midst of all his glory, and in the presence of all the great men of the nation, was very mortifying to his pride; and in an instant he betrayed what was in his heart. Had he been displeased with himself, it had been well: but "he was displeased" with God, whom he considered as dealing wrongfully and unjustly towards him. Alas! that so good a man should indulge such an unhallowed disposition. Had he himself corrected one of his little children, he would have expected the child to conclude of course, from the very correction itself, that something was amiss in him, though he could not immediately see wherein the evil of his conduct lay: and should not David have exercised that same temper towards God? Should he not have concluded that God was too wise to err, and too good to do any thing which was not strictly right? Should he not have acted, as he did on another occasion, "I was dumb and opened not my mouth, because thou didst it?"

It

[c] Lev. x. 1, 2.
[d] Josh. vii. 5, 11, 12.
[e] Lev. x. 3.
[f] Ps. lxxxix. 7.

It is characteristic of the vilest of men to fly, as it were, in the face of God[g]; yea, it is their very employment in hell to curse him for the judgments he inflicts[h]. Did such a temper then become "the man after God's own heart?" No; he should rather have said, "It is the Lord; let him do what seemeth him good[i];" "I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against him[k]." But in this conduct of his we have a lamentable illustration of that proverb, "The foolishness of man perverteth his way, and his heart fretteth against the Lord[l]."]

2. With unbelieving fear—

[He now concluded that God was an hard master, whom it was impossible to serve: he therefore would not venture any more to take to him the ark: "He was afraid of the Lord, and said, How shall the ark of the Lord come unto me?" This was a slavish fear, and utterly unbecoming one who had so often experienced the most signal tokens of his favour. This was to act like the rebellious heads of the tribes, when, in their contest with Aaron for the priesthood, God had decided the cause against them[m]: or rather it was a repetition of the conduct of the Philistines upon a precisely similar occasion[n]. But this was very unbecoming his high character. He should rather have instituted an inquiry into the reason of the Divine procedure; and should have humbled himself before God for the errors that had been committed. For this he might have found precedents in plenty in the Sacred Records[o]: but he yielded at once to despondency, and dismissed the whole assembly of Israel, and left the ark to be taken in by any one that was bold enough to receive it.

Such was his unhappy frame on this occasion: and such, alas! is the temper of many under the chastisements of the Almighty: they are ready to say, "It is in vain to serve the Lord;" there is no hope: I have loved idols, and after them will I go"———]

APPLICATION—

1. Let us be especially on our guard, when we are engaged in the service of our God—

[God is a jealous God, and will not be trifled with. The conduct which would be connived at by him among the heathen, will provoke him to anger when observed among those who enjoy the light of revelation: and in proportion as we have the knowledge of him, may a conformity to his will be justly expected of us[p]. Happy would it be, if the professors of religion lay this thought to heart! for, so far are they from having any dispensation from the practice of morality, that a far higher tone of morals

[g] Isai. viii. 21. [h] Rev. xvi. 9—11. [i] 1 Sam. iii. 18.
[k] Mic. vii. 9. [l] Prov. xix. 3. [m] Numb. xvii. 12, 13.
[n] 1 Sam. v. 10, 11. [o] Josh. vii. 6. Judg. xx. 26.
[p] Am. iii. 2.

morals is expected of them; they are called upon to "shine as lights in the world," and to "be holy as God himself is holy."

And must not this thought be pre-eminently interesting to those who are engaged in the service of the sanctuary? What manner of persons ought *they* to be in all holy conversation and godliness!" Sins even of ignorance are highly criminal[q]; but most of all in *them*[r]. Let those then who "bear the vessels of the Lord be clean[s]." Let a holy fear attend them in all their ministrations, lest, instead of finding acceptance with their God, they bring on themselves the heavier and more signal judgments. Miserable it is to die; but most of all to "*die by the ark of God.*"]

2. Let nothing divert us from the path of duty—

[If, when engaged in the service of our God, we meet with obstacles which we did not expect, let us search to find wherein we have done amiss; but let us not yield to despondency, as if it were impossible to please the Lord. Let us examine the Sacred Records, and pray for the teachings of the Holy Spirit, that "we may know what the good and perfect and acceptable will of God is:" then may we hope for success in our undertakings, and shall have tokens of God's acceptance both in this world and the world to come[t]———]

[q] Lev. v. 17—19.

[r] Compare the offerings required in Lev. iv. 3, 13, 14, 27, 28.; of the *priest*, a bullock, equivalent to the whole congregation; but of a common person, a female kid.

[s] Isai. lii. 11.

[t] This may be applied to *Ministers* with good effect.

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## CCIX.

### DAVID DANCING BEFORE THE ARK.

2 Sam. vi. 22. *I will yet be more vile than thus, and will be base in mine own sight.*

A MEASURE of firmness is necessary in the whole of our intercourse with mankind, to prevent us from being drawn aside from the path of wisdom into a compliance with the prejudices and passions of those around us. But in all that pertains to religion it is more especially necessary; because in opposition to true piety the current is exceeding strong; and we must inevitably be borne away by it, if we do not cleave unto our God with full purpose of heart. The great and powerful may be supposed to be more

more free than others from the influence of public opinion: but their very elevation exposed them to storms and tempests more than others; and they have therefore the more need of firmness, to bear up against the taunts with which they will be assailed, in proportion as their zeal for God is ardent and conspicuous. David was a mighty monarch: yet not even he could serve God according to his conscience without exciting the contempt and indignation of one most nearly related to him. But from the words which we have just read, we see how manfully he withstood the temptation. Let us notice,

I. The trial he met with—

This was very severe—

[He was bringing up the ark to Mount Zion; and had good reason to believe, that the service he was performing was pleasing and acceptable in the sight of God. Hence his soul overflowed with joy; and in the fulness of his heart "he danced before the Lord with all his might[a]." "As the ark came into the city, Michal, Saul's daughter, looking through a window, saw him leaping and dancing before the Lord, and despised him in her heart[b]." Unconscious of the impression he had made on her mind, he went home to bless both her and all his house: but instead of finding the reception which he had expected as suited to the occasion, he was greeted with reproaches more keen and scandalous than one should have supposed it possible for the most ingenious malice to invent: "How glorious was the king of Israel to-day, who uncovered himself to-day in the eyes of the handmaids of his servants, as one of the vain fellows shamelessly uncovereth himself[c]!" How must he be thunder-struck, if I may so say, with such a salutation as this! To hear such a construction put upon his conduct! to be accused of an act which no one that was not lost to all sense of decency would commit even in private, and much less in the presence of thousands! to be accused of committing this too under the guise of religious zeal! and to hear this accusation from the lips of his own wife, and in language too as acrimonious and insulting as hell itself could inspire! and all this at a moment when his soul, inflamed only with love to God, was wrapt into the third heavens! how inconceivably painful must this have been! Methinks, the cursings of Shimei were nothing in comparison of this.]

Yet

[a] ver. 14. [b] ver. 16. [c] ver. 20.

Yet do we see in this what all who are zealous for their God must expect—

[Religious zeal is hated by the world, who will never fail to misconstrue it as proceeding from some hateful principle, and as forming a cloak for some hidden abomination. Pride, conceit, fanaticism, and hypocrisy, are usually considered as the springs of action to those who profess godliness, especially if they bear any conspicuous part in the service of their God: their very activity is made the ground of accusation against them. Thus it has been in every age. David "wept and chastened himself with fasting; and *that* was turned to his reproach[d]." John Baptist came in an abstemious way; and the people said of him, "He has a devil." The Lord Jesus Christ came in a way more suited to the liberty of the Gospel dispensation; and his enemies took occasion from that to revile him as a "gluttonous man, and a wine-bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners[e]." Thus it is also in the present day; and thus we must expect to find it: for "the servant cannot be above his Lord: if they have called the Master of the house Beelzebub, much more will they those of his household[f]." Our blessed Lord has told us, that, "if the world hated him, they will hate us also[g]:" that they will "speak all manner of evil against us falsely for his sake[h];" and that they will even think they render service to God by putting to death his most faithful servants[i]. Nor will any eminence in rank, or power, or talent, or wisdom, or piety, exempt us from this lot. If David could not escape it, neither can we: if Paul was said to be "beside himself[k]," those who tread in his steps must not expect to be regarded as of a sound mind. Nor will this opprobrious treatment proceed only from avowed enemies: our nearest friends and relatives will often be foremost in the assault; and "our bitterest foes be those of our own household[l]."]

Having seen somewhat of David's trial, let us consider,

II. The determination he formed in consequence of it—

Neither abashed nor irritated, he calmly avowed his unalterable determination,

1. To serve his God without fear—

[If to bear this open testimony for his God, and to glorify him thus in the sight of all Israel, was to render himself vile, "he would be more and more vile" as long as he lived. A noble resolution this, and worthy to be adopted by every child of man! Are

[d] Ps. lxix. 10, 11. [e] Luke vii. 33, 34. [f] Matt. x. 24, 25.
[g] John xv. 18. [h] Matt. v. 11. [i] John xvi. 2.
[k] Acts xxvi. 24. [l] Matt. x. 36.

Are the servants of Satan bold, and shall Jehovah's servants be cowards? Shall the ungodly commit all manner of iniquity without shame, and the godly be ashamed of walking in the ways of righteousness? No: there should be a holy energy in the soul of every saint, a readiness to rise to the occasion, however formidable that occasion be: he should have within him the elasticity of a strong well-tempered spring, whose re-action is always augmented by the pressure. If religion be decried through the whole land, so that not a second family could be found in all Israel to adhere to God, we should say with Joshua, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord[m]." Reproach for Christ's sake should be regarded as honour[n], and, though not coveted, yet be welcomed, as the truest riches[o]. It should be considered as a precious gift of God for Christ's sake[p], and be gloried in as a participation of Christ's sufferings, and a means of advancing his glory[q]. We should be cautious indeed not by extravagance or misconduct of any kind to *merit* reproach: but, if it come for righteousness' sake, we should rejoice in it, and glorify God for it[r], "taking pleasure in it[s]" as a testimony in our favour[t], and a pledge[u] of an accumulated[x] and everlasting weight of glory[y]. Nor is it against reproach only that we should stand, but against the most envenomed persecution that men or devils can raise against us. We should be moved by no menaces, however cruel; but be ready to lay down our lives for Christ's sake[z], and account martyrdom a ground, not of pity and condolence, but of congratulation and joy[a].]

## 4. To abase himself without shame—

[The chief reason of Michal's rage was, that she thought David degraded himself by this public exhibition, which, however it might have become one of his inferior servants, was unsuited to his dignity. But David felt that a monarch in the sight of God is no more than other men; and that any elevation of rank which he possessed above others was rather a call to honour God the more, and not a reason for withholding from God any expression of gratitude and love. Hence he determined to regard himself as on a level with the least and meanest of his subjects in every thing that had respect to God. Nor would he value himself on this as an act of condescension, and thus convert humility into pride; but he would really be in his own estimation, what he professed before others to be, "less than the least of all saints[b]," unworthy to "be a door-keeper in the house of his God[c]" or to unloose the latchet of his Master's shoes[d].

And

[m] Josh. xxiv. 15.
[n] Acts v. 41.
[o] Heb. xi. 26.
[p] Phil. i. 29.
[q] 1 Pet. iv. 12—14.
[r] ib. ver. 15, 16.
[s] 2 Cor. xii. 10.
[t] Luke xxi. 13.
[u] 2 Tim. ii. 12.
[x] 2 Cor. iv. 17.
[y] Rom. viii. 17.
[z] Acts xx. 24.
[a] Phil. ii. 17, 18.
[b] Eph. iii. 8.
[c] Ps. lxxxiv. 10.
[d] John i. 27.

And this is the frame of mind which we also should cultivate. So far from regarding earthly distinctions as a reason for rendering to God a more measured service, as though the highest acts of piety were fitted only for the vulgar, we should consider wealth, honour, learning, and influence of every kind, as talents committed to us for the purpose of honouring God with them, and of rendering our example more effectual for the good of others. And, whilst the world is reproaching us for the *excess* of our piety, we should be ever abasing ourselves on account of its *defects*. If we keep in view the perfect requirements of God's law, and the unbounded obligations which he has laid us under by the gift of his only-begotten Son, how infinitely short of our duty will our best services appear! "Our very righteousnesses, in this view, will be as filthy rags[e]," in which we can never hope to appear before God, and which can never come up with acceptance before him, till they have been washed in the Redeemer's blood[f]. Thus, whether men admire or reproach us for our piety, we should equally abase ourselves, as in reality deserving neither their admiration nor their reproach, but rather their pity on account of the defectiveness of our services, and the smallness of our attainments.]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who cast reproaches on the saints—

[Behold Michal and David on this occasion, and say, whether you would not rather be the persecuted saint, than the malignant persecutor? Is there a creature in the world who must not acknowledge the superiority of David's state, in the midst of all the ignominy that was cast upon him? Such then is the state of God's people in the midst of all the calumnies with which they are loaded, and such is the light in which their calumniators are regarded by Almighty God. In the instance before us, God marked his displeasure against Michal, by inflicting the curse of barrenness upon her to her dying hour[g]. And us also he warns in the most solemn manner to avoid the rock on which she split: "Be ye not mockers, lest your bands be made strong[h]." If we choose not to serve God ourselves, let us beware how by scoffing and ridicule we discourage others: for our Lord tells us, that "it were better for us that a millstone were hanged about our neck and we were cast into the depths of the sea, than that we should offend one of his little ones[i]." To perish under the guilt of our own sins will be terrible enough: but to have "the blood of others also required at our hands" will be an inconceivable augmentation of our guilt and misery. This then would I intreat of all who despise and persecute the followers

[e] Isai. lxiv. 6. [f] Rev. vii. 14. [g] ver. 23.
[h] Isai. xxviii. 22. [i] Matt. xviii. 6.

followers of Christ. Look into the Scriptures: see whether you approve of Cain, of Ishmael, of Michal, of Festus, or of any who bear the stamp and character of revilers in the Sacred Records: see whether in your consciences you do not rather side with Abel, and Isaac, and David, and Paul, and all the other sufferers, "of whom the world itself was not worthy[k]?" And if your own consciences bear testimony to the saints, dare not to walk in the steps of their oppressors, persecuting the living saints, whilst you raise memorials to the dead[l].]

2. Those who are called to sustain them—

[Think it not strange that reproach is cast upon you for righteousness sake; for thus it has been from the beginning: "They who have been born only of the flesh ever have persecuted those who are born after the Spirit," and so they will continue to do even to the end. You may, if you please, avoid persecution: "if you will be of the world, the world will love its own." But are you prepared to sacrifice all your hopes and prospects in the eternal world? St. James says, that "the friendship of the world is enmity with God; and that they who will be the friends of the world, must be the enemies of God:" say then, Are ye in doubt which of the alternatives to choose? What good can the world do you by its friendship, or what evil can it inflict by its enmity? To kill the body is the worst that they can do. But what will not God do for his faithful servants? and what will he not inflict on those who turn back from him? Can you think of being denied by Christ before the assembled universe, and not tremble[m]? O consider this, and you will not hesitate a moment whom to serve; but will "choose that good part which shall never be taken away from you." You will gladly "suffer affliction with the people of God, and esteem the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of the whole world."]

[k] Heb. xi. 38. [l] Matt. xxiii. 29—31. [m] Matt. x. 32, 33.

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## CCX.

### NATHAN'S PARABLE.

2 Sam. xii. 1—7. *And the Lord sent Nathan unto David. And he came unto him, and said unto him, There were two men in one city; the one rich, and the other poor. The rich man had exceeding many flocks and herds; but the poor man had nothing save one little ewe-lamb, which he had bought, and nourished up; and it grew up together with him and with his children: it did eat of his own meat, and drank of his own cup, and lay in his bosom, and was unto him as a daughter.*

*And*

*And there came a traveller unto the rich man; and he spared to take of his own flock, and of his own herd, to dress for the way-faring man that was come unto him; but took the poor man's lamb, and dressed it for the man that was come unto him. And David's anger was greatly kindled against the man; and he said to Nathan, As the Lord liveth, the man that hath done this thing shall surely die: and he shall restore the lamb four-fold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity. And Nathan said unto David, Thou art the man.*

GOD, in the disposal of his gifts, does not conduct himself by any such laws as are necessary for the regulation of human actions. He is a Sovereign who may deal with his creatures as he pleases, without "giving account to us of any of his matters." Accordingly we find that sometimes he has exercised a severity beyond what we, with our limited apprehensions, might have expected: and at other times he has shewn mercy, where we could have expected nothing but the heaviest judgments. We have lately seen him striking Uzzah dead for a well-meant error, and taking the kingdom from Saul for not waiting quite so long for Samuel as he should have done: but in our text we behold him sending a prophet unto David to bring him to repentance, after the commission of such crimes as cannot be contemplated without horror and amazement. But "His ways are not as our ways, nor his thoughts as our thoughts."

The conduct of David as portrayed in our text, together with the means used by Nathan to humble him for it, lead us to shew,

I. To what an awful extent a man's conscience may be seared—

We read of persons whose "consciences are seared as with an hot iron[a]:" and such was now the state of David—

[One would have supposed that, after the commission of adultery with Bathsheba, he would have been scarcely able to endure his existence through the agonies of his mind: but he was only concerned about concealing it from man: accordingly, on finding that her pregnancy must of necessity lead to a discovery

[a] 1 Tim. iv. 2.

very of the crime, he adopted various means to deceive Uriah; and when he did not succeed in them, he sent an order to Joab to expose, and to desert, him in battle, so as to insure his death by the hands of the enemy. Would one not suppose that such complicated crimes as these should awaken him? Yet behold for nine or ten months he was, as far as appears to us, altogether insensible of his guilt.

At the same time he was quick-sighted enough to the crimes of others, and severe in the extreme against the man, whom Nathan represented as oppressively taking the favourite lamb of a poor neighbour in preference to one out of his own flock: he deemed that man to be worthy of death, because he had shewn no pity; and adjudged him to pay four-fold for the injury he had committed.

Who can reflect on this without utter astonishment? That so holy a man as David, who had been so honoured of the Lord, and had done so much for the honour of his God, should be left to fall in so grievous a manner, and to lie for so long a time impenitent in his sins! Who can look upon it, and not weep for him? Who can look upon it, and not tremble for himself?]

But awful as this state of mind appears, it is, alas! too common in this world—

[Such enormous crimes indeed as those of David are not common: but who has not committed some evils which ought to have humbled him in the dust before God? — — — yet who has not continued months, and even years, without ever abasing himself with humiliation and contrition? Who has not shewn a strange insensibility with respect to the guilt he has contracted? — — — We can easily discern the faults of others, and can censure them with severity; but towards our own we are most blind and most indulgent.

Nor must we be considered here as referring altogether to those who despise religion: it is a common evil: it is found even in the house of God: there are professors of religion who are as blind to their own sins, as if they never had known what sin was; and who, if their misdeeds are unknown to man, continue for years unhumbled in the sight of God. Yes; there are too many, who are both blinded and "hardened by the deceitfulness of sin;" and, if ever God should give them true repentance, they will be as much astonished at their present insensibility, as now they are at that which is recorded in our text.]

Seeing then how callous a man's conscience may become, let us inquire,

II. In what way it may be most successfully excited to perform its office—

Much

Much may be learned from the conduct of Nathan on this occasion:

1. We should endeavour to divest men of the self-love that blinds them—

[This was well contrived in the parable that Nathan spake. David did not see the drift of the parable as relating to himself, and therefore felt no personal interest in his decision. Hence his judgment was free, and his determination of the cause unbiassed. Had he been aware that he was about to condemn himself, he would have been far more indulgent towards the offending person.

Now this mode of convicting persons, who would have revolted at any plainer dealing, has been frequently practised with good effect. It was to such an expedient that Joab resorted, in order to prevail on David to recall his son Absalom from banishment[b]———and by a similar device a Prophet constrained Ahab to condemn himself for sparing Benhadad, whom God had delivered into his hands to be destroyed[c]——— Our Lord himself also frequently adopted the same method of counteracting the prejudices of the Scribes and Pharisees[d]——— By such means a person is silenced at once, and is "condemned out of his own mouth." True indeed, in cases where the mind is open to conviction, these precautions are less necessary; but the sentence that is founded on such grounds is always less offensive, because the criminal passes it upon himself.]

2. We should however combine fidelity with address—

[Sooner or later we must come to the point, "Thou art the man." We are to consider ourselves as messengers of the Most High God, who has said, "He that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully. What is the chaff to the wheat[e]?" We must not fear the face of man: our concern for his welfare must swallow up all dread of his displeasure; and the consideration of the account which we must one day give to God, must impel us, even at the peril of our lives, to bear a faithful testimony in his service. Behold the boldness of Elijah in reproving Ahab[f]; and of John in condemning the incestuous commerce of Herod[g]: these are the examples which we must follow, when milder methods have proved ineffectual: but our object must always be, not merely to acquit ourselves to God as faithful monitors, but to win the souls of those whom we admonish. The recollection of our own weakness, and proneness to fall, must

[b] 2 Sam. xiv. 5—11, 20. [c] 1 Kin. xx. 35—42.
[d] Matt. xxi. 40—45. [e] Jer. xxiii. 28.
[f] 1 Kin. xviii. 17, 18. & xxi. 19—21.
[g] Matt. xiv. 4.

must ever render us as tender as possible towards our fallen brother: "we must restore him in the spirit of meekness; considering ourselves, lest we also be tempted[h]."]

Let us then, in the view of this history, LEARN,

1. To tremble for ourselves—

[Did David fall? Who then is safe? Did David sink into such an obdurate state? Who has not reason to dread lest he be given over to a reprobate mind? Clear enough it is from whence repentance must proceed, whether in its first commencement, or in its further progress: if God work it not in us by his Holy Spirit, we shall be altogether as insensible as a rock of adamant. Let none of us then indulge a proud security, or imagine ourselves out of the reach of temptation; "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall"——]

2. To rejoice in God—

[O what mercy did God display on this occasion; that instead of cutting off the royal miscreant by some signal judgment, he sent a Prophet to awaken his drowsy conscience, and bring him to repentance! We lament indeed, that many have taken occasion from David's fall to make light of sin; and from his recovery, to imagine, that God will never execute his threatened judgment: but we have reason to bless our God that such a monument of mercy has been exhibited in the Scriptures. How many thousands of backsliding Christians have been restored by means of this one example! We are now encouraged to say to all, however heinous their iniquities have been, "Return, ye backsliding children; and God will heal your backslidings, and love you freely." "Only acknowledge your iniquity," and then "it shall not be your ruin." Is there any one amongst us who has become hardened in his sins? Oh, hear what God says to his people of old[i]; and seek "repentance unto life," even that "repentance which is not to be repented of."]

[h] Gal. vi. 1. [i] Isai. lvii. 17, 18.

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## CCXI.

### DAVID'S HUMILIATION AND ACCEPTANCE.

2 Sam. xii. 13. *And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the Lord. And Nathan said unto David, The Lord also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die.*

IT is scarcely to be conceived to what a degree sin will blind the eyes, and harden the heart. We see

see indeed that the ungodly world will commit every species of iniquity without either shame or remorse: but who would imagine that a person enlightened, renewed, and sanctified by the Spirit of God, should in the space of a few days be reduced by sin to a state of utter obduracy? Yet such was the change which one single temptation speedily effected on him who was "the man after God's own heart." The circumstances of David's crime are so well known, that they need not at present to be enlarged upon. But his long impenitence, his apparent forgetfulness of his horrid deeds, and his excessive severity against a man whose fault bore no proportion to his own, are less noticed; though they cannot fail to strike every one who reads the account of his conversation with Nathan. By an apposite and well-wrought parable, the prophet Nathan had led David inadvertently to pass sentence against himself; and then availed himself of the opportunity to charge home upon him the crimes he had perpetrated. Then it was, and not till then, that David felt a just sense of his guilt: though nine months at least had elapsed since his criminal intercourse with Bath-sheba, yet his conscience had slept, till it was now awakened to perform its office. On this occasion he confessed his sin to Nathan; and received from Nathan a consolatory assurance, that his iniquity, heinous as it was, was pardoned.

There are two points to which the text directs our attention;

I. David's humiliation—

There does not at first sight appear any thing worthy of notice in David's confession: but, if we examine it carefully, we shall find in it several things which indicated a deep and true repentance.

1. He acknowledged his sin as an offence against God—

[The evil of sin *in this view* is generally overlooked; and the quality of actions is appreciated and determined by their effects on society. Hence the offences which are committed solely against God, such as unbelief, impenitence, self-righteousness, and

and the like, are never condemned by the world, or even considered as blemishing the moral character at all; while such crimes as theft and perjury render a man universally execrated and abhorred. But it is from its relation to God that sin derives its principal malignity: its chief heinousness consists in its being a violation of God's law, a contempt of his authority, and a practical denial of all his attributes. If any sin whatever could deserve to be marked with superior infamy on other considerations, it would surely be the crimes which David had committed: yet, in adverting to these very actions, David passes over their criminality in relation to man, and notices them only as offences against God[a]. This shews that he had just views of his conduct: and that the grounds of his humiliation were precisely such as the occasion required.]

2. He made no attempt to extenuate his guilt—

[Unhumbled persons uniformly endeavour to palliate their faults. Adam cast the blame of his transgression on Eve; and Eve transferred it to the serpent[b]. Saul, when reproved for sparing Agag and the chief of the spoil, shifted the blame from himself upon the people; and, as far as it still attached to him, excused himself as acting involuntarily, and as overawed by the people[c]. But David's mouth was shut: he uttered not one single word in extenuation of his crimes: heavy as Nathan's charge against him was, he fell under it. This was another excellent proof of his penitence and contrition: and it is certain, that wherever real humiliation is, the penitent will be more ready to aggravate his guilt, than to palliate and excuse it.]

3. He manifested no displeasure against his reprover—

[Men in general, and great men in particular, are very apt to take offence, when told of their faults. They think themselves at liberty to insult God as much as they please: but no one must take the liberty to maintain the cause of God in opposition to them. Some indeed have been found, in different ages, who have ventured to speak with faithfulness to monarchs: but they have always done it at the peril of their lives[d], and not unfrequently have paid the penalty of death for their presumption[e]. But in the present instance no displeasure at all was manifested: on the contrary, we have reason to think that Nathan was more endeared to David than ever by his fidelity, since David afterwards

[a] See Ps. li. 4. Joseph's views of sin perfectly agreed with those of David. See Gen. xxxix. 9.

[b] Gen. iii. 12, 13. [c] 1 Sam. xv. 15, 24.

[d] See 1 Kin. xiii. 4. & xxi. 20. & xxii. 8. & 2 Kin. i. 9. & 2 Chron. xvi. 10.

[e] 2 Chron. xxiv. 21. & xxv. 16. & Matt. xiv. 3—5, 10.

wards called one of his own children by the prophet's name[f]; and shewed confidence in him to the latest hour of his life[g]. In this therefore we have a further evidence of the sincerity and depth of David's repentance.]

4. He was willing to take shame to himself even before men—

[There is nothing which men will not do in order to conceal their guilt from men: they will "add iniquity to iniquity," and perpetrate murder itself, in order to avoid the shame to which their crimes have exposed them. How keenly was Saul affected by Samuel's refusal to honour him before the people! The dread of that public dishonour pained him more than all the denunciations of God's wrath[h]. But the reproaches of men, however severe, were of no account in David's eyes: that which pained him was, that he had given occasion for those reproaches, and that God would be dishonoured by them: and therefore, though he thereby published and perpetuated his own shame, he wrote some of his penitential Psalms, and set them to music for the use of penitents in that and all succeeding ages. Being "vile in his own eyes," it was a matter of small concern to him that he was vile also in the eyes of others: he lothed and "abhorred himself," and therefore submitted readily to be abhorred by others.]

The truth of his repentance being manifest, we proceed to notice,

II. His acceptance consequent upon it—

Very remarkable was the answer of the prophet to the royal penitent. We remark from it that David's acceptance with God was,

1. Immediate—

[There was no interval of time between the confession of David and the reply of Nathan. The very instant that David repented, God forgave him. This is particularly noticed by David himself as a marvellous expression of God's love and mercy; "I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin[i]." We should have expected that God would suspend his forgiveness, till David should have evinced the truth of his repentance by a subsequent life of piety: but "God's ways and thoughts are not like ours; yea rather, they are as much above ours as the heavens are above the earth[k]." God acts in a way worthy of himself. His grace is his own, to dispose of according to his sovereign will; and he dispenses

[f] 2 Sam. v. 14. [g] 1 Kin. i. 24, 27, 32—34.
[h] 1 Sam. xv. 25—30. [i] Ps. xxxii. 5. [k] Isai. lv. 8, 9.

dispenses it to whomsoever, and in whatever way, he sees fit. He shews, if we may so speak, peculiar pleasure in manifesting his compassion towards repenting sinners. He represents himself as falling on the neck of the returning prodigal, and as interrupting his confessions by testimonies of his parental love and pardoning grace. Towards the dying thief also our incarnate God displayed the same readiness to forgive, in that he not only complied with his petition, but far exceeded, without one moment's hesitation, his most enlarged desires[l].

Thus has he given us a practical comment on his own gracious declarations, and demonstrated, for our comfort, that he is "slow to anger and ready to forgive."]

2. Attested—

[Nathan spake, not as a man who suggested only a surmise or doubtful opinion, but as a prophet who was inspired to declare what God had really done. God willed not that his repenting servant should be kept in suspense; and therefore ordered Nathan to communicate to him the joyful tidings, not that God *would* put away his sin, but that he *had* put it away, and that the penal consequences of his transgression should never come upon his soul. It is thus that God frequently acts towards his people: as he made known to David by his prophet, so he reveals to them by his Spirit, that their iniquities are forgiven, and their sins covered[m]. He desires not the constrained service of a slave, but the willing and grateful obedience of a child. "Though he cause grief, yet will he have compassion according to the multitude of his mercies[n];" and will cause his believing people to enjoy an assured sense of their acceptance with him[o].]

3. Complete—

[The sins which David had committed were from that very moment "blotted out as a morning cloud:" neither his adultery nor his murder, nor one particle of guilt of any kind, was imputed to him. There were indeed some temporal judgments entailed upon him: the fruit of his adulterous commerce was blasted, and the child stricken with death. David's own wives were all defiled publickly by his son Absalom: and the sword, according to Nathan's prediction, never departed from his house. These things however were merely temporal, and were designed as much for the benefit of others as for his correction: they tended to impress on all a sense of the malignity of David's crimes; and to shew that, however God might pity and forgive a sinner, he utterly and unchangeably abhorred sin. But, notwithstanding these *remembrancers* of his iniquity, his sin was "cast, as it were, into the very depths of the sea;" as ours also shall be, if we truly repent; nor

[l] Luke xxiii. 42, 43.
[m] See Isai. vi. 7. & xxxviii. 17. Zech. iii. 4.
[n] Lam. iii. 32.
[o] Isai. xii. 1. & Rom. viii. 15, 16.

nor will God ever remember them against us any more for ever[p].]

We may LEARN then from this subject,

1. The benefit of a judicious and faithful Ministry—

[The method which Nathan used in order to reach the conscience of David, was extremely judicious: and when he had succeeded in making a breach, then he commenced a direct attack, "Thou art the man." Had he been less cautious, he had probably shut the ears of his royal master; and had he been satisfied with offering some oblique hints, he had failed to impress his callous mind. But by a happy union of wisdom and fidelity, he gained his point[q]. Well was it for David that he had such a prophet in his court; for, without *his* admonitions, he might probably have become more and more obdurate, till he had perished in his sin. Thus should all esteem themselves highly favoured of God, if they have a Minister, who, while he fears not the faces of men, has a tender love for their souls. They should gladly listen to his admonitions, and thankfully receive his reproofs: they should make it a continual subject of their prayers, that his word may come with power to their souls, to awaken them to a sense of sin, and to bring them to the enjoyment of salvation.]

2. The boundless extent of God's mercy—

[Who would have conceived it possible that such sins as David's should be so soon forgiven? But, "as God's majesty is, so also is his mercy." "He delighteth in mercy;" and "waits that he may be gracious unto us." His message to us is, "Only acknowledge thy transgressions that thou hast sinned against the Lord thy God[r]." And for our encouragement he declares, "If any say, I have sinned, and it profited me not; I will deliver him from going down into the pit, and his soul shall see the light[s]." Let us then carry all our sins to him: whether they have been more or less heinous in the sight of men, let us not continue under the guilt of them, when they may be so speedily removed: let us remember, that, in and through Christ, God is reconciled to a guilty world; and that, while "they who cover their sins shall not prosper, whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall find mercy[t]."]

[p] Mic. vii. 18, 19. Heb. viii. 12.
[q] Prov. xxv. 12.
[r] Jer. iii. 13.
[s] Job xxxiii. 27, 28.
[t] Prov. xxviii. 13.

## CCXII.

### AMNON AND TAMAR.

2 Sam. xiii. 15. *Then Amnon hated her exceedingly; so that the hatred wherewith he hated her, was greater than the love wherewith he had loved her.*

THE word of God will surely take effect in due season; and every threatening in it, as well as every promise, will be accomplished. God had, with most astonishing mercy, so far pardoned the iniquity of David, as to remit all punishment of it in the future world: but, as his sin had produced a public scandal, and had caused the name of God to be blasphemed through the land, God warned him by Nathan, that he should be visited with troubles through life; with troubles in his own family, not unlike to those which he himself had brought on the family of Uriah. Accordingly we find that these troubles speedily commenced. His eldest son Amnon, the heir to his throne, conceived a criminal desire after his half-sister, Tamar; and so violent was his passion, that his health was visibly impaired by it. By the advice of his friend Jonadab, he laid a plan for getting her within his reach; and then, when she would not consent to his impious purposes, he effected them by force. But no sooner had he accomplished his wishes, than his love was turned into a most inveterate hatred; insomuch that, as our text informs us, "the hatred wherewith he hated her was greater than the love wherewith he had loved her." Now this change of his mind gives us a deep insight into human nature; and affords us occasion for many profitable remarks upon,

I. The love of the ungodly—

As it is not our design to dwell more than is necessary on the particular event that is here recorded, we shall consider personal attachment as comprehending both love and friendship. Now love, in this extended sense, may exist in a very high degree where

where there is no religious principle; it may even in some respects vie with the most exalted instances that are to be found in the Church of God; with the love of Jacob to Rachel, for the sake of whom seven years of servitude appeared but as a few days [a]; and with the friendship that subsisted between David and Jonathan, whose love for each other exceeded even the love of women [b]. But it must be confessed, that far the greater part of that which passes for love and friendship in the world, is bad; and that even the best of it is very defective. For the elucidating of this point we shall shew,

1. The criminality of that which is evil—

[Behold that which is spoken of in our text: it was exceeding ardent, it is true; but it was *selfish, cruel, impious:* it had respect to nothing but personal gratification; it sought that gratification at the expense of the honour, the interest, the happiness of the object beloved; and it trampled under foot every law whether human or divine. In the case before us this is plain and obvious; and it will be found that very much of that which is called love and friendship, is of precisely the same stamp and character. It is scarcely needful to advert to that which issues in the seduction of innocence, and a dereliction of the seduced object to all the horrors of infamy and want; yet, how many thousands, of the lower classes especially, have reason to deplore and execrate the existence of such love, amongst their family, their friends, or their acquaintance! Nor is the friendship of innumerable classes both in higher and lower life unlike to this. Behold the gamester; he has his friends to whom he is strongly attached, not for any valuable qualities in them, but because they administer to his pleasure: but so cruel is his attachment, that if he can win from them all that they possess, he will gladly do it, though he thereby reduce both them and their families to the lowest ebb of misery and ruin. In like manner the persons that unite for what is called conviviality and good fellowship: what are these, but confederates against the God of heaven and earth, associated together to encourage one another in a contempt of his majesty, and a violation of his laws. If men unite for the purposes of plunder, or in resistance to the constituted authorities of the land, we conceive that we do them no injustice, when we speak of them as thieves or rebels: nor will God designate by any gentler terms the union of those who uphold one another in a systematic opposition to his holy will. Whatever be the particular line of conduct they pursue, whether the

[a] Gen. xxix. 20. [b] 2 Sam. i. 25, 26.

the more flagrant one of open licentiousness, or the more approved one of sober sensuality, their love is *selfish*, because it centres in self; it is *cruel*, because it seeks its own ends without regard to the happiness of others; and it is *impious*, because it is a conspiracy to banish God from the world.]

2. The deficiency of that which is good—

[Nothing is more honourable than virtuous love, nor any thing more delightful than friendship founded on virtuous principles. But still if the attachment be merely that which springs from natural affections, it is defective: it is defective in its *foundation*, its *exercise*, its *continuance*.

That cannot be perfect which has not piety for *its basis*. Our love to each other should spring from our love to God, and have respect to his image in the person beloved. The person's conformity to God's mind and will should be the reason, and the measure of our love to him. Where this is not the case, the union will be in danger of being dissolved by that very thing which ought most powerfully to cement it. If one of the parties become pious, the change will only produce alienation of heart in him whose attachment was founded on natural qualities or attainments: the correspondence of sentiment which is essential to love will have ceased; and the most ardent affection will from thenceforth either be changed into hatred, or subside into cold respect.

As the foundation of merely natural attachments is defective, so also is *the exercise:* for how can our love aim at the spiritual welfare of its object, when we ourselves have no spiritual sensibility? We may do much, and suffer much, for the temporal happiness of those we love; but we shall retard, rather than advance, whatever could conduce to the good of his soul. How miserably defective then must such attachment be, when, instead of promoting, it obstructs the most valuable ends of life!

Nor is it possible, in the very nature of things, for such attachments to *continue* beyond the present state of existence. The righteous have a prospect beyond the grave. As a river gliding sweetly through its banks is separated at last by an intervening pier, and then flows in renewed union to the ocean to part no more, so do the godly pass their days together in sweet communion, till separated for a moment by death, they meet again in the future world, to spend an eternity together in unfading bliss. But no such prospect opens to the worldly man: however happy he may be in his love or friendship, his views are bounded by the narrow limits of this present world. We might add too, that even in this world its continuance is most uncertain: for where religion does not reign in the heart, and form the basis of our affection, the attachment is liable to be easily interrupted, and speedily dissolved: and it is but too often found, that when the object

ceases, through illness or poverty, to administer the wonted satisfaction, attachment languishes, and gives way to indifference and neglect.]

Intimately connected with this subject is,

II. The hatred of the unjust—

That men should hate those who injure them, will not create in us any surprise; but that they should hate *those whom they have injured*, and *because they have injured them*, may seem strange indeed: but this is really the common course of human events. The instance recorded in our text is worthy of particular notice. The injury which Amnon had done to Tamar was beyond measure great: and, if his love underwent any change at all, we might well suppose that it would give way to pity and compassion. But behold, instead of harbouring any tender emotions towards her, he was instantly inflamed with the most inveterate resentment; insomuch that, ardent as his love had been, his hatred now far exceeded it. But this change was founded in human nature, and was precisely such as injustice is calculated to produce. We hate those whom we have injured,

1. Because we have lowered ourselves in their esteem—

[We all affect the esteem of our fellow-creatures; and it is well to do so: "a good name is rather to be chosen than great riches, and loving-favour rather than silver and gold[c]." Whilst we are unconscious of having done any thing to forfeit a person's esteem, we conclude, as a matter of course, that we possess it: but when we are sensible that we have injured him in any respect, we feel that we have suffered loss in his esteem: and this loss we resent as an injury done to ourselves. It is by no means uncommon for persons so to expose themselves to censure by their follies, as to render the society in which they mix, and even the town or village in which they live, disgustful to them; and they hate all the people whose censure they have incurred, for no other reason than because they have seen and noticed the improprieties of their conduct. Their pride is wounded; and they impute that to the malignity of others, which they should ascribe rather to their own folly. Thus it is with respect to injuries of every kind: we feel that the commission of them lessens our character in the eyes of him whom we have injured;

[c] Prov. xxii. 1.

injured; and not having any suitable humiliation in our own souls, we impute that to malignity in him, which is the sole fruit of our injustice.]

2. Because we have enabled him to lower us in the estimation of others—

[We can easily go to sleep in sin, provided our iniquity be unknown; but a discovery of it fills us with the most pungent grief. Now if we have injured any person, we have put ourselves in the power of that person, so that he can inflict upon us the severest wounds, by exposing our conduct to public reprehension. Some indeed there are who care but little about their character, and who are therefore indifferent whether their conduct be exposed or not: but, where character is dear to a man, and he has done any thing which would involve him in much disgrace, there his hatred will proportionably rise against the person that is privy to his shame. We cannot find a more striking instance of this than in the history of David. He had injured his friend Uriah in the basest manner; and used all possible methods to conceal his shame. Having failed in these, he found that Uriah must of necessity ere long discover the injury he had received; and therefore he longed for Uriah's death; yea, he actually laid a snare for his life, and was delighted to hear that he had successfully attained his murderous object. We are far from saying that every man's resentment would carry him to this length, even where the same grounds for it existed: but we have no doubt, that there is not any one who, in similar circumstances, would not rejoice to hear that the person whom he had injured was dead: all concern about his life would be swallowed up in the hope of concealing his own shame, and retaining an unblemished character before men.]

3. Because we conceive him to be our enemy—

[It is natural to suppose that those whom we have injured are our enemies: and that consideration is quite sufficient to excite hatred in the bosom of an unjust man. Hence Solomon observes, "A lying tongue hateth those that are afflicted by it[cc]." Indeed it is from this consideration that men hate the Scriptures, and even God himself: they know that the Scriptures are against them, and that God is displeased with them: and therefore "they hate the light, and will not come to the light, lest their deeds should be reproved:" yea, they say, "Make the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us;" or, as the fool in his heart, "I wish there were no God[d]!" In like manner they hate pious Ministers also, as Ahab did; "I hate Micaiah, because he doth not speak good concerning me, but evil." Whilst we suppose that men love us, there is no difficulty in

[cc] Prov. xxvi. 28. [d] Isai. xxx. 11. Ps. xiv. 1.

in loving them: the vilest of publicans and sinners will do this: but when we think that our persons or our characters are odious to others, it requires much grace to feel a loving spirit towards them; a grace which no ungodly man can exercise, nor any unjust man possess. Resentment is the only fruit which nature, so circumstanced, will produce.]

Many valuable LESSONS may be learned from this subject: we may see in particular the importance,

1. Of cultivating a religious principle—

[Had Amnon felt the power of religion in his soul, he would have withstood the first impulse of his desire, and said, "How shall I do this great wickedness, and sin against God!" Or, if he had been overcome with the temptation, he would at least have sought to repair the injury he had done, and not have aggravated it by such cruel treatment. But, being destitute of all religious principle, he was the sport of every lust, and was driven from one extreme to another, as a leaf before the wind. And what can we expect, but to be equally unstable, though we should not commit exactly the same enormities as he? Yes; nothing but a religious principle will keep us firm. If we have the fear of God in our hearts, we shall "stand in awe, and not sin," even though we know that our iniquity will not be discovered by mortal eyes: and if we have the love of Christ in our hearts, that will constrain us to live to him, in a holy conformity to his will, and in a cheerful obedience to his commands.]

2. Of associating with pious friends—

[Had Jonadab been pious, he would have instantly endeavoured to divert Amnon from his purpose: but, being himself an ungodly man, he offered himself a pander to Amnon's lusts, and suggested to him the plan whereby he might obtain the gratification he desired. Thus was he, in fact, the instrument whereby these horrid impieties were accomplished. Thus it is with ungodly companions at all times: instead of discountenancing evil, they will encourage it, and facilitate the execution of it to the uttermost. Knowing then, as we do, how apt we are to imbibe the spirit of our friends, should we not be careful with whom we associate? Should we not select our friends from the wise and good, rather than from among the giddy and profane? "He that walketh with wise men," says Solomon, "will be wise; but a companion of fools shall be destroyed[e]." Let us remember that "evil communications will corrupt good manners;" and let us choose those for our associates in this world, whom we shall wish to dwell with in the world to come.]

3. Of setting a good example—

[We

[e] Prov. xiii. 20.

[We cannot but trace, in some degree at least, the wickedness of Amnon to the sad example which David had set him. Amnon would be ready to excuse his own conduct towards Tamar, in comparison of David towards Bathsheba and Uriah. "At all events," he would say, "my father cannot be very severe in censuring me, when he recollects what he himself has done." In like manner, if we give the world occasion to reproach us, we shall lose all weight and influence in reproving them; yea, we shall harden them in their iniquities, and encourage them to vindicate themselves from our example. Let parents, and masters, and all that are in authority, bear this in mind, that one bad act of theirs will do more to countenance sin, than ten good admonitions will do to repress it. Let religious professors in particular remember it; for if they cast a stumbling-block before men, they will be accountable to God for all the evil that ensues. Methinks, in this, and in many subsequent events, David could not but see the sad fruit of his own iniquities; and that very consideration would add ten-fold poignancy to all his grief: and many parents may find in the conduct of their children the severest reprehension for their own neglects. Let us guard against all such occasion for self-reproach; and endeavour so to act, that we may be able to say to all around us, "Whatsoever ye have seen and heard in me, do, and the God of peace shall be with you."]

## CCXIII.

### DAVID DRIVEN FROM HIS THRONE BY ABSALOM.

2 Sam. xv. 25, 26. *And the king said unto Zadok, Carry back the ark of God into the city: if I shall find favour in the eyes of the Lord, he will bring me again, and shew me both it and his habitation. But if he thus say, I have no delight in thee; behold, here am I; let him do to me as seemeth good unto him.*

SIN, though forgiven, rarely passes unpunished in this present world: on the contrary, God marks his indignation against it here, in order to embitter it the more to the offender who has committed it, and to endear to him the more that mercy which has been exercised towards him. At the very time that he forgave the sin of David, he declared to the pardoned penitent, that the sword should never pass from his house, even to his latest hour. Accordingly we find, that David was afflicted in no common degree

in

in his own family; and in such a way as strongly to bring his sins to his remembrance. He had dishonoured the wife of his friend Uriah; and his own son Amnon violates his daughter Tamar. He had contrived and accomplished the death of Uriah; and his son Absalom contrived and accomplished the death of his own brother Amnon. He had dishonoured God in the face of the whole world; and he himself is driven with scorn and infamy from his throne. Yet, though in this respect a monument of God's displeasure, he was now living nigh to God, in the exercise of all holy duties, and heavenly affections. At no period of his life was grace more in exercise within him, as appears from the spirit which he manifested under his afflictions. To exhibit this spirit in its true colours, and to make a suitable improvement of it for our own souls, is the scope and object of our present discourse.

I. Mark his spirit and conduct under his afflictions—

To two points in particular the text calls our attention:

1. His reverence for God—

[David having suddenly fled from Jerusalem in order to escape from the sword of Absalom, Zadok and the Levites brought forth the ark to David, that he might be able in this emergency to consult it. But David ordered Zadok to carry it back: for, though nothing in the world was so desirable to him as the presence of God, he regarded this measure as highly inexpedient.

It was *unauthorized;* and therefore wrong. That sacred symbol of the Deity was not to be moved about according to the wishes or conceits of men. In the wilderness it had never moved, but as the pillar and the cloud, in which the Deity resided, led the way. And to dispose of it in this manner, without any direction from God, was such an act of impious presumption as he dared not to commit. He well remembered the rebuke which he himself had met with, when, with the best intentions, he had moved the ark without attending to the forms prescribed by God himself; suffering it to be drawn in a cart by oxen, instead of carrying it on the shoulders of the Levites: for the smiting of Uzzah was a testimony of God's displeasure against him for his inattention, no less than against Uzzah himself for his presumption[a]. He remembered too the judgments inflicted on

[a] 1 Chron. xv. 13.

on above fifty thousand men of Bethshemesh for daring to look into the ark[b]: and therefore he trembled at the thought of acting towards it with irreverence or indiscretion.

It was also *unnecessary*. He knew by experience that God's presence was not confined to the ark; but that he was accessible to his people at all times, and in all places. Often had he, when driven out from Jerusalem by Saul, made known his requests in prayer to God, and obtained from him the most gracious answers: and therefore he doubted not but that God would still continue to him his gracious communications in the time of need, notwithstanding the absence of that symbol, through which, under other circumstances, he ought to have been approached.

It was moreover *unavailing*. What could the ark do, unless accompanied by God himself? What had it done for Israel when taken from Shiloh to protect them against the Philistines? Of itself it had no power: and therefore it was taken prisoner by the Philistines, whilst those who bare it were slain[c]. And what if this unauthorized measure should lead to a similar result? How could he ever lift up his head again, after having brought such dishonour upon God?

It was *impious*. What was this, but to transfer to a creature the attributes of Deity, and to expect from the ark the help which could proceed from God alone? This would have been to provoke God to jealousy, and to excite his displeasure at the very time that he most needed an interest in his favour?

On these grounds David sent back the ark; and humbly committed his cause into the hands of his invisible but Almighty Protector.]

## 2. His submission to God—

[Exceeding heavy were the afflictions of David at this time. He was driven from his throne; in hourly danger of being destroyed with all his faithful attendants; and this through the ambition and cruelty of his favourite son. Forsaken by some of his most endeared friends, and loaded with curses by his envenomed enemies, he fled in the most disconsolate state that can be imagined. Hear the pathetic account given of him in the following context: "David went up by the ascent of Mount Olivet, and wept as he went up, and had his head covered; and he went bare-foot. And all the people that were with him covered every man his head; and they went up, weeping as they went up[d]." But his afflictions were great, no less in a spiritual than in a temporal view. Indeed it is in this view that he chiefly complains of them throughout the Psalms[e] — — —

But in the midst of all, he submitted meekly to the painful dispensation, leaving it to God to order for him whatsoever in His wisdom

[b] 1 Sam. vi. 19. [c] 1 Sam. iv. 11. [d] ver. 30.
[e] See Ps. xlii. 1—5, 10. & xliii. 3, 4. & lxxxiv. 1—4.

wisdom he should see fit. He knew that, if God should interpose in his behalf, all should yet issue well, and he should yet again worship God in his sanctuary: but, if God had ordained otherwise, he was prepared to kiss the rod, and to bless the hand that chastised him with it. "If I shall find favour in the eyes of the Lord, he will bring me again, and shew me both the ark and his habitation: but if he thus say, I have no delight in thee; behold, here am I, let him do unto me as seemeth good unto him."

In all this he was doubtless actuated by a sense of his own extreme unworthiness: he saw that the affliction which was laid upon him, was an accomplishment of the threatening long since denounced against him by God himself, and "he received it as the punishment of his iniquity." At the same time, assured in his own mind that the strokes were inflicted by a loving Father, and not by an avenging Judge, he desired only that God should glorify himself in any way which he saw best: "I was dumb, and opened not my mouth, because thou didst it[f]."]

Confine not however your views to David; but,

II. Improve the subject for the benefit of your own souls—

1. See here the sufferings of that Saviour whom he typified—

[David was a most remarkable type of Christ, no less in his sufferings than in his exaltation to the throne of Israel. In all the Psalms where he speaks of his sufferings, he speaks quite as much in the person of the Messiah as in his own person[g]——— Even where he seems most exclusively to refer to his own case, he is quoted by St. Paul as pre-eminently typifying the Lord Jesus: "Innumerable evils have compassed me about: mine iniquities have taken hold upon me, that I am not able to look up; they are more than the hairs of my head; therefore my heart faileth me." Doubtless these words, as far as they relate to Christ, speak of him only as bearing the sins of others, whilst David suffered only for his own: but the whole psalm is in a very peculiar degree descriptive of the Lord Jesus[h]. Behold Jesus then as cast out by his whole nation, who said, "We will not have this man to reign over us[i]!" Behold him forsaken by his own Disciples whom he loved, and betrayed by one who had eaten bread with him, even by Judas, who was actually typified by Achitophel[k]! Behold him going over that very brook Kedron[l], pursued by armed bands[ll], who sought and laboured to destroy him!

But

[f] Ps. xxxix. 9. [g] See Ps. xxii. & lxix.
[h] Compare Ps. xl. 6—8. with Heb. x. 5—9.
[i] ver. 23. with John xviii. 1.
[k] Ps. xli. 9. with John xiii. 18. [l] John xviii. 1. [ll] ib. ver. 3.

But behold more particularly His deportment under his afflictions. Here was David pre-eminently a type of Him. When the bitter cup was put into his hands, though he prayed for the removal of it, he said, "Not my will, but thine be done." When loaded with execrations, as David was by Shimei, he submitted meekly to the insults, as the Apostle says; "When he was reviled, he reviled not again; when he suffered, threatened not; but committed himself to Him that judgeth righteously." As David too was chiefly solicitous for the welfare of the very man who sought his life, (giving express charge to all to spare the life of Absalom,) so did our blessed Lord pray and plead for his murderers; "Father, forgive them! for they know not what they do."

Thus whilst you admire the spirit and conduct of David, you may well take occasion to admire the infinitely sublimer spirit of the Lord Jesus.]

2. Look to him as an example under any sufferings which you yourselves may be called to bear—

[This is the improvement which an inspired Apostle teaches us to make of the subject: "Take, my brethren, says St. James, the Prophets who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience." We ourselves are all exposed to sufferings, even as David was: for "we are born to trouble, as the sparks fly upward:" nor do we know how soon troubles may come upon us. The possession of a crown was no exemption to David; nor can any situation, in which we may be, prove an exemption to us. The more secure we are in our own apprehension, the more reason we have to expect that some calamity is near at hand. The saying, "My mountain stands strong; I shall not be moved;" will be a prelude to the hiding of God's face, and the incursion of some heavy trouble[m]. The very things to which we looked for comfort may become an occasion of the bitterest anguish. Absalom was considered as the most beautiful youth in all Israel, and no doubt had often been looked upon by David with inexpressible delight; yet this was the man who assassinated his brother and dethroned his father. And thus it is often found, at this day, that the objects of our fondest delight become, not the innocent occasions only, but even the guilty sources, of our bitterest affliction.

Are there then any amongst us oppressed with trouble? Let us look to David, and after his example commit our cause to God with meek submission and with humble affiance. Let us see the hand of God in our trials, and view men only as his instruments raised up by him to fulfil and execute his will[n]. Let us view men and devils only as the axe or saw in the hand of him that uses it; and, under a sense of our own extreme unworthiness,

[m] Ps. xxx. 6, 7. [n] Ps. xvii. 13. Isai. x. 5, 15.

ness, let us "receive evil at the Lord's hands as well as good," and "bless him" equally for whichever in his providence he ordains for us[o].]

3. Seek a kingdom of which you can never be dispossessed—

[David was at that time the mightiest monarch upon earth: yet how soon, and how easily, was he dispossessed of his throne. To what then can we look as stable and permanent? Alas! like Shebna, we may in an instant be cast out from all that we possess, even as a stone is cast out from a sling[p]. But there is "a kingdom which cannot be moved," and "against which the gates of hell shall not prevail." This is the inheritance which our Lord Jesus Christ will give to all who truly believe in him———— Of this David was secure: and therefore he regarded not the loss of an earthly kingdom; but willingly submitted to it, if God had so ordained. Do ye likewise secure a portion that is out of the reach of any enemies. Have God for your friend; and you need not care who is your enemy: for "if He be for you, none can with any effect be against you." You may look with complacency on the gathering storm, and defy all the powers of earth and hell to hurt you. So did David[q]; and so did Paul[r]: and so may the least and weakest of the human race: for "the lame shall take the prey[s]:" though they were prisoners too, "they should take those captives, whose captives they were; and should rule over their oppressors[t]:" yea, though they were even slain, yet should they rise to resume the conflict; and "their enemies should fall under the slain[u]." "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom[x]:" and, once possessed of that, "all tears shall be wiped away from your eyes for ever[y]."]

[o] Job i. 21. [p] Isai. xxii. 15—19. [q] Ps. xlvi. 1—3.
[r] Rom. viii. 35—39. [s] Isai. xxxiii. 23. & xxvi. 6.
[t] Isai. xiv. 2. [u] Isai. x. 4. [x] Luke xii. 32.
[y] Rev. xxi. 3, 4.

## CCXIV.

### DAVID'S SUBMISSION TO HIS AFFLICTIONS.

2 Sam. xv. 30. *And David went up by the ascent of Mount Olivet, and wept as he went up, and had his head covered; and he went barefoot: and all the people that was with him covered every man his head; and they went up, weeping as they went up.*

A CON-

A CONSCIOUSNESS of ill-desert has a tendency to reconcile us to the afflictions with which our sins are visited. In some respect indeed it embitters our trials, which the testimony of a good conscience would alleviate: but in other respects it has a good effect, in that it silences every murmur against the dispensations of a righteous Providence. The troubles which David had experienced in his family as the punishment of his own sins, had already been great and manifold: but in the rebellion of Absalom they were risen to their height: they were borne however with a spirit of piety suited to his state, and worthy of his high character.

Let us consider,

I. The circumstances in which he was placed—

These were most afflictive—

[He was now driven from his throne, banished from the ordinances of religion, and in danger of immediate destruction. Now considering him as a man, such adversity must be painful in the extreme; and still more when we recollect that he was *a king*, and therefore susceptible of pain in proportion to the degradation which he suffered. But view him as *a man of humanity*, and then how distressing must it be to see his country involved in civil war, and to be himself on the eve of a bloody engagement with thousands of his own subjects! View him also as *a man of piety*, driven from the ordinances of religion, and suffering under the rebukes of an offended God; what can be conceived more distressing than such a state as his?]

But they derived ten-fold poignancy from the source from whence they flowed—

[The people that inflicted these wounds were *his own subjects*. Had he been attacked by foreign enemies, he would have gone forth against them with alacrity: but to be constrained to fight with those over whom he had reigned so many years, in whose defence he had so often exposed his own life, and for whose benefit he had laboured all his days, this filled him with the deepest grief[a].

But amongst the insurgents was *his own peculiar friend*, from whose counsel and assistance he might have derived the greatest benefit. How keenly he felt this disappointment, we learn from the lamentation he poured out on this memorable occasion[b]: and who that has known the sweets of friendship must not sympathize with him?

But

[a] Ps. lv. 1—8. with Zech. xiii. 6. [b] ib. ver. 12—14.

But the bitterest ingredient in his cup was, that it was mixed for him by *his own son;* that son, whom he had so recently, and so undeservedly received to favour, and in whose professions of piety he had begun to rejoice[c]. As the most exalted joys, so also the acutest sorrows, flow from those who stand to us in the relation of children: and in proportion as this worthless son was beloved by him, was the anguish occasioned by his rebellious conduct. The insulting language of Shimei was of no account in the mind of David; *that* he was willing to bear[d]: but to be so treated by his beloved Absalom, was a grief almost insupportable[e]. And we doubt not but that every tender parent will readily understand how greatly such a consideration must have overwhelmed his mind.]

Let us next proceed to notice,

II. His conduct under those circumstances—

Zadok and Abiathar had brought to him the ark, judging that it must be a comfort and a benefit to him to have access to God under his heavy trials. But David ordered them to carry back the ark, being himself prepared for every event, inasmuch as he enjoyed in his own soul,

1. A confidence in God's care—

[David well knew that God's presence was not confined to the ark, nor his agency necessarily connected with it. He knew that wherever his enemies might drive him, God's ear would be open to his prayer, and his arm be extended for his relief. Hence, though he honoured the ark as the symbol of God's presence, he did not confide in *it:* but trusted in God, who was represented by it. He knew that, if God should be on his side, the efforts of his enemies would be all in vain; and that, however menacing their aspect at the present, he should in due time be brought back again in safety.

Such is the confidence which God's people should maintain under all the trials which they may be called to endure. "The name of God is a strong tower to which they may run," and in which they may defy their bitterest enemies. "If He be for them, none can be against them;" "nor can any weapon that is formed against them prosper." It is the privilege of every saint to know, that his affairs are in God's hands; and that as nothing *can* be done but by the divine permission, so nothing *shall* be done, which shall not work for his spiritual and eternal good. The language of his soul therefore should at all times be, "The Lord is on my side; I will not fear what flesh can do unto me"———]

2. A sub-

[c] 2 Sam. xv. 7—9. [d] 2 Sam. xvi. 5—11. [e] ver. 30.

2. A submission to his will—

[What God might have ordained respecting him, David did not know; nor was he curious to inquire: but, whatever might be the issue of his present afflictions, he was contented and satisfied. Well he knew that he deserved all that God could lay upon him; and he was ready to say, "I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against him[f]." This is one fruit of sin, if I may so speak; or rather, of that humiliation which accompanies true repentance: we become reconciled to whatever God may do, seeing that any chastisement in this world must be less than our iniquities have deserved. O that in the prospect of the heaviest calamities we might have such a view of our ill-desert, as should dispose us humbly to commit ourselves into God's hands, and cordially to welcome every trial which his all-wise providence may appoint for us! Under every affliction, our acquiescence should be like that of Eli, "It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good."]

[f] Mic. vii. 9.

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## CCXV.

### DAVID'S LAMENTATION OVER ABSALOM.

2 Sam. xviii. 33. *And the king was much moved, and went up to the chamber over the gate, and wept; and, as he went, thus he said, O my son Absalom! my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!*

THIS life is at best a checquered scene: the happiness of man is rarely of long continuance; nor is it ever altogether without alloy: the sweetest cup we taste has always in it, either in a greater or less degree, an infusion of gall: it is in heaven alone that our blessedness is complete. David had attained a full possession of the throne of Israel: but troubles arose to him from various quarters, and especially from his own family; even his own son rose up in rebellion against him, to dethrone him. The rebellion was scarcely matured before it was quashed: but alas! his son, his favourite son, was slain: and how bitterly he laid to heart this calamity, may be seen from the words which we have now read.

We

We propose to notice,

I. The grief of David for the loss of Absalom—

This was in some respects right and commendable—

[*He did well in mourning for the death of a son.* God has put into the heart of parents a love for their offspring: and indeed such a love was necessary to counterbalance the cares and troubles which a family entails. That love of necessity contains in it the seeds of sorrow, when evil befalls the offspring, or death snatches them away. Even the irrational creation are deeply penetrated with this feeling, and manifest it in a very high degree, whenever the loss of their offspring calls it into exercise. We wonder not, therefore, that a man of David's piety should greatly bewail the death of his favourite son. We do not disapprove of him when for seven successive days he wept, and fasted, and prayed for the life of his dying infant; much less can we blame his grief for a son of mature age and eminent accomplishments.

*But still more was his grief justified, when we consider the circumstances under which his son was taken away.* Absalom, alas! was very unfit to die: he was a man of an abandoned character. He was an assassin, and had murdered his own brother Amnon. He was a rebel against the king whom God himself had called to the throne, even against his own father. He was, in heart at least and design, a murderer of his own father: for when the proposal was made by Achitophel so to contrive the attack as to destroy his father only, it was highly gratifying to this unnatural son. Moreover, *for the express purpose* of making himself "abhorred by his father," and of precluding all possibility of reconciliation with him, "he went in to his father's concubines in the sight of all Israel." Such was the state of Absalom, when death arrested him. What a tremendous load of guilt was here, under the whole of which he expired, without any space given him for repentance! Well then might David weep for him, even tears of blood. David well knew the misery of those who died in their sins, and had often wept for the inconsiderateness of those who overlooked their danger: well therefore might he weep as he did for the miserable end of Absalom.]

In other respects it certainly was wrong—

[The dispensation was indeed most afflictive; but still it called for different feelings in the mind of David. In it there was a mixture of mercy and of judgment: and, if he had viewed it aright, his sorrows would have been tempered with resignation and gratitude. The death of Absalom was in part *a punishment of David's sin* in the matter of Uriah; and therefore when

when the judgment was inflicted, he should, like Aaron, have "held his peace[a]," or have said, like Eli, "It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good[b]." The death of Absalom was also *a mercy both to David and to all Israel*, inasmuch as it put a speedy end to the calamities of civil war, and was the means of re-establishing David on the throne of Israel. Should not this then have called for thanksgiving on the part of David? Yet behold, there was but too much justice in the remark of Joab, that David was insensible of all these mercies; and that he would have been better pleased with the loss of all his faithful adherents that had exposed their lives for him, than of this graceless wretch who had sought his destruction[c]. Surely such grief could not be justified: after all the allowance that must be made for the affection of a parent, and the compassion of a saint, we are constrained to acknowledge, that the feelings of David on this occasion were ill regulated and unchastised. He seems almost to have quarrelled with God, when he should rather have said, like Job, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord[d]!"]

Much instruction however may be gathered from this expression of David's grief. Let us proceed to consider,

II. The lessons it is calculated to teach us—

Much instruction does it impart,

1. To men in general—

[It teaches us loudly *to moderate our affections towards the creature*. Whatever God bestow upon us, we are apt to fix our affections too strongly on it, and to forget that is *a loan* rather than *a gift*: we forget that it still remains the Lord's, and that he has a right to call for it whenever he will. Hence if it be unexpectedly withdrawn from us, we are ready to grieve and murmur, as if every source of happiness were cut off from us: because a cistern is broken, we lament, as if the fountain itself also were dried up. This is especially the case in reference to near and dear relations: but such inordinate regard to the creature is idolatry; and it will sooner or later bring its own punishment along with it.

It teaches us also *to proportion our sorrows to the occasion*. Sorrow is allowable, especially for the loss of our friends or relatives. So far was our Lord from condemning the grief of Martha and Mary for the death of their brother, that he himself joined in it; "Jesus wept." Grief too on such occasions may sometimes be very deep. If, for instance, a Minister be removed in

[a] Lev. x. 3. [b] 1 Sam. iii. 18. [c] 2 Sam. xix. 3—6.
[d] Job i. 21.

in the midst of all his usefulness, as Stephen was, there is good reason why "great lamentation should be made for him," because the loss of such an one to the Church of God is incalculable[e]. If a man be not taken away in the midst of life, yet, if he have been eminently good and greatly distinguished, he may also be deeply lamented[f]. Nor is this due to *public* characters only: *private* individuals also, who have rendered themselves useful in their day and generation, may well be thus deplored. Dorcas had laid herself out for the comfort and support of the poor: she had assisted them in the way that best suited her ability and their wants: and therefore when she was withdrawn by death, the loss of her was much bewailed, and a lively interest was excited to get her, if possible, restored to life[g]. Thus a concern for the general good may fitly increase the tide of our sorrows on the removal of any one by death: but there are occasions, as when any saint is released from a state of deep affliction and distress, when we may rather rejoice over them, as resting from their labours, and happy in the fruition of their God[h]. But in any case we must guard against that inordinate sorrow which renders us unmindful of God's mercies, or insensible of our own desert.]

2. To parents and children in particular—

[Parents, surely you may learn from the history before us *to cut off all occasion for self-reproach* in the event of your children's death. No doubt David was too indulgent towards Absalom, and had forborne to punish him as he deserved. And what a bitter reflection it will be to you to think, that you had not exerted yourselves to the utmost of your power for the repressing of sin in your children, and the cultivating of an heavenly principle in their minds! You well know how God marked his indignation against Eli for this very thing[i]. His fault was, not that he encouraged his sons to sin, but that he did not exert himself with sufficient energy to reclaim them. O think what you will say, if you neglect to warn, to reprove, and to instruct your children! how will you answer it at the tribunal of God? Are Ministers responsible for the souls committed to their charge? so are you for the children whom God has entrusted unto you. He has said to you, as Pharaoh's daughter, "Take these and bring them up for me;" and, if they perish through your neglect, "their blood will be required at your hands." Endeavour then to impress them with a sense of their duty to God. You often try to convince them how much *you* have loved them; but

[e] Acts viii. 2. If this be a *Funeral Sermon*, any observations respecting the character of the deceased may be introduced, where it best accords with the subject as here treated.

[f] Gen. l. 7—11. [g] Acts ix. 36—39. [h] Rev. xiv. 13.

[i] 1 Sam. ii. 27—34. & iii. 13, 14.

but you are apt to forget to shew them how CHRIST hath loved them. David's love to Absalom was nothing in comparison of Christ's to them: Christ did not merely under a momentary conflict of mind *wish* that he had died for them; but he actually *did* die for them, yea and endured the curse due to their sins, and left the bosom of his Father on purpose that he might do so; and foreseeing from eternity all that he must suffer, he formed the purpose, and never receded from it, till he had accomplished all that was necessary for their salvation: and all this he did, when they were in open rebellion against him. You may convince them of your love, and yet produce no permanent effect upon them; they may continue hostile both to God and you: but convince them of the love of Christ to them, and that will constrain them to live in all dutiful obedience both to God and man.

Children, learn ye also from this history to regard the instructions of your parents. See, in Absalom, the effect and recompence of wilful disobedience! And be careful not to grieve the souls of your parents, by constraining them to "sorrow for you as without hope." If you die before them, what distress will your state occasion! or, if you survive them, how will they be pained in a dying hour to have no prospect of meeting you in a better world! Remember, that however much they love you now, they will be swift witnesses against you in the day of judgment; and all the efforts which they made for your salvation, will only aggravate your eternal condemnation. Be wise then in time, and labour, that whether you survive your parents or die before them, you may be their joy and crown of rejoicing to all eternity.]

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## CCXVI.

### THE SHORTNESS OF LIFE A GROUND FOR INDIFFERENCE TO THE THINGS OF THIS WORLD.

2 Sam. xix. 34. *And Barzillai said unto the king, How long have I to live?*

GREAT virtues rarely, if ever, exist alone: the soul that gives them birth is actuated by a principle, which is generally, though perhaps not universally, operative. We behold in the history before us an instance of great generosity towards David and his attendants, in their flight from Absalom. And we have a no less amiable instance of modesty in the same character, when David, after the defeat of Absalom, and the consequent restoration of peace,

desired to reward the services of his benefactor. "Barzillai had provided David with sustenance while he lay at Mahanaim;" and David now intreated him to come and spend the remainder of his days with him at Jerusalem, that he might repay all his kindness to the utmost of his power: but Barzillai declined the offer, and said, "How long have I to live, that I should go up with the king to Jerusalem?"

The question, "How long have I to live?" is proper for us all to put to ourselves at this time: and it will be profitable for us to consider it,

I. In reference to the things of time—

This is certainly its primary import in the passage before us. Barzillai "was a very aged man," and intimated to David, that, on account of his great age, he had no longer any relish for the gratifications of sense, nor could he hope to continue much longer in the world; and that therefore it would ill become him to be an attendant at court, when he ought rather to be thinking only of death[a]. In this view the question was most just, and pathetic: and in this view it deserves universal attention.

Our time must of necessity be short—

[If we are advanced in life, this truth is obvious; but if we be in the bloom of youth, it is no less certain: for, what is the space of man's life? it is only seventy or eighty years at most: and though that appears long in the prospect, it appears as nothing in the retrospect: every aged man will tell you that his life has passed away as a dream———And besides the shortness of life, we must take into the account its uncertainty also: for who can tell what a day, or even an hour, may bring forth? Truly, every man may justly say, "There is but a step between me and death"———]

From this consideration we may well rise superior to all the vanities of time and sense—

[Let us suppose a man condemned to death, and about to be executed in a few hours; What would be his feelings in reference to every thing here below? Would he take much complacency in any thing he possessed, or be much affected with any tidings either of loss or gain? No: the things of time and sense would appear to him in their true colours, and be

[a] ver. 35—37.

be regarded by him as of little importance: the near prospect of that hour when he must bid an eternal farewell to all of them would shew him their emptiness and vanity. Now this is the feeling which every man should cherish. We say not, that any man should neglect his worldly business, or be forgetful of any relative duty; but that he should have his affections withdrawn from every thing here below, and set on things above: he should be divested of anxious care about the acquisition of earthly things; and, in his enjoyment of them, "his moderation should be known unto all men." This is the direction given by St. Paul; and it is founded on the very consideration that is suggested to us in the text[b].]

Just as this sentiment is in reference to the things of time, it is still more so,

II. In reference to the things of eternity—

In the view of eternity, a thousand years may be represented but as "the twinkling of an eye." How long then have any of us to live,

1. That we should neglect our eternal concerns—

[Have any of us made a covenant with death? or has God said to any of us, as to Hezekiah, "I will add unto thy life fifteen years?" Is it not, on the contrary, almost a certainty that God has said concerning many who are here present, "This year thou shalt die?" How then can we think of continuing any longer to neglect our souls? If repentance be necessary for every child of man; if there be no possibility of acceptance for us but by fleeing for refuge to the Lord Jesus Christ; and, if they who die in an impenitent and unbelieving state must perish for ever; then is it folly to defer concerns of our souls to a more convenient season, which very probably may never arrive. The concerns of time are so utterly insignificant when compared with those of eternity, that to give them a preference in our minds is not folly only, but madness.]

2. That we should be lukewarm in our attention to them—

[Most men will allow that some attention to the soul is proper: but with the generality, even of those who would be thought religious, the welfare of the soul is only a subordinate and secondary concern. Such lukewarmness however is no less displeasing to God, and injurious to the soul, than total indifference[c]. We are apt to think that a little exertion will suffice for the securing of our eternal interests: but is there so little to be done, that it may be finished in a day? or are we sure that so many days will be added to our life as shall make up the deficiency of our zeal and diligence? Do we find that people in

[b] 1 Cor. vii. 29—31. [c] Rev. iii. 15, 16.

in a race find time to loiter? How much less then have we, whose career may terminate so soon? And what have we in life that shall compensate for the loss of our souls? Is there any earthly gratification, even if it could be enjoyed a thousand years, to be compared with the felicity of heaven? "Whatever then our hand findeth to do, let us do it with all our might."]

ADDRESS—

1. The young—

[You are looking for years to come; but may soon "be cut down as a flower." Youth is the time most fitted for holy exercises and heavenly employments———Begin then without delay, and "remember your Creator in the days of your youth."]

2. Those in middle age—

[You are thinking that you have nearly attained the object of your wishes: but you have found your past attainments vain; and such will be the character of all that you may yet acquire. Temporal duties, we repeat it, are to be performed with diligence; but nothing is of any value in comparison of the soul.]

3. Those who are far advanced in life—

[Say whether Barzillai's conduct do not well become you? You feel infirmities; you know that in the course of nature you have but a short time to live: let earthly things then be regarded by you with indifference, and heavenly things increasingly occupy your minds. Familiarize yourselves with the thoughts of death and judgment; and "press forward" with ever-increasing alacrity to secure "the prize of your high calling."

At every period of life, but especially in old age, should we pray with David, "Lord, make me to know my end, and the measure of my days, what it is; that I may know how frail I am[d]:" "So teach me to number my days, that I may apply my heart unto wisdom[e]."]

[d] Ps. xxxix. 4. [e] Ps. xc. 12.

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## CCXVII.

### FAMINE A PUNISHMENT FOR SIN.

2 Sam. xxi. 1. *Then there was a famine in the days of David three years, year after year; and David inquired of the Lord. And the Lord answered, It is for Saul, and for his bloody house, because he slew the Gibeonites.*

THE reign of David was full of troubles occasioned by his own sin: but here we view him and his

his people afflicted for the sins of others. Saul, his predecessor in the government, had grievously oppressed the Gibeonites, whom Joshua, at his first entrance into Canaan, had pledged the nation, by covenant and by oath, to protect. This breach of covenant God overlooked, as it were, at the time, but now punished by three successive years of famine.

The history teaches us,

I. In what light we should view public calamities—

[The Scripture uniformly represents them as punishments inflicted on account of sin. Personal troubles may be sent for the purpose of calling into action the grace that has been bestowed, and for the advancing of God's glory in the exercise of that grace[a]. But the troubles of a nation are judgments sent from God. In this light, "war, famine, pestilence, and the noisome beast," are frequently mentioned; and in this light they should be viewed. We are indeed very averse to regard them as coming from God: we are ready to ascribe them to second causes, and to overlook the first Great Cause of all: but in the Scriptures we behold them, as in the plagues of Egypt, so manifestly proceeding from a divine hand, that we cannot help referring them to God: and thus we ought to do, whatever be the more immediate occasion of them[b] ——— David in the first and second years of famine did not behold any expression of the Divine displeasure, or think of inquiring wherefore the visitation was sent: it was only when the pressure of the affliction was very heavy and of long continuance, that he thought of tracing the hand of God in it: had he acted in the first year as he did in the third, we have no reason to think that the judgment would have been repeated: but his blindness constrained God to repeat the stroke, till it was noticed as proceeding from him. In like manner God will continue his chastisements to us, till we are made sensible that we have offended him, and provoked his just displeasure.]

Whatever be the calamities with which we are afflicted, we may learn from this history,

II. The way in which we may get them removed—

1. We should inquire into the sinful causes of them—

[David inquired of the Lord; and was informed that the troubles now sent were visitations for sin committed by Saul long

[a] This was the case with respect to Job. [b] Isai. xxvi. 11.

long ago. The particular offence of Saul is not elsewhere noticed in the history; nor does it appear to have been much regarded by any of the people. His cruelty to the Gibeonites indeed had been notorious; but, as the Gibeonites were the lowest of the people, and not descended from Abraham, the oppression they endured excited no sympathy or compassion. God however resented it; and he will resent the injuries that are done, however mean the objects may be who suffer them, or however great the tyrants may be who inflict them.

And, if we would inquire of the Lord, might not *we* find some cause for the long protracted war in which we have been engaged, and for the repeated failure in our crops of corn? Yes, many public causes may be assigned, such as the general contempt poured upon God's word, and sabbaths, and name and people, and, above all, upon his blessed Gospel; and every individual (for it is of individuals that the community is formed) may find in himself abundant reason for those judgments with which God has visited the land.

It is highly necessary also that those whose distresses are of a private and personal nature, should take occasion from them to inquire of God, as Job did, "Shew me, O Lord, wherefore thou contendest with me[c]" — — —]

## 2. We should put away whatever is displeasing to God—

[The injuries which had been done to the Gibeonites could not be repaired; nor could Saul who had committed them be punished, because he was now dead. David therefore asked the Gibeonites what redress they required? They sought not any thing for themselves, either in a way of pecuniary compensation, or of freedom from the yoke which they had so long borne: but they required that seven of Saul's sons should be delivered into their hands, to be put to death. This was not a vindictive act, but an act of retributive justice: and it was approved by God, who after the execution of these persons was pacified towards the land[d]. Such a kind of retribution would not be justifiable amongst *us;* because the children are not to suffer for the parents' crimes: but, as ordered of God, it was right: and, if the whole truth were known, we should probably find that the sons of Saul had aided and abetted the wicked devices of their father; and that they therefore justly suffered as partners in his crime.

But though we cannot act precisely as David or the Gibeonites did, we may, both nationally and individually, put away the evils which have displeased our God; and indeed we all without exception are bound to "crucify our flesh with its affections and lusts." It is in this way only that we can hope to avert the Divine judgments from us; for, though nothing but the blood of

[c] Job x. 2. [d] ver. 14.

of Christ can wash away sin, it never will or can avail for the pardon of any, who do not turn unto God in newness of life.]

From hence then we may LEARN,

1. The danger of sin—

[Sin, however forgotten by us, is remembered by God; yea, the whole of our sins, even from the earliest period of our existence, are as much in the immediate sight of God, as if they had been committed this very day: and there is a time when we must answer for them all. Let sin then be repented of, and put away; for it will surely bring the wrath of God on all who retain it unlamented, and unsubdued.]

2. The benefit of Christ's atonement—

[The blood of Saul's sons was poured forth as a sacrifice to national justice, and as a means of averting the Divine displeasure; and it was considered by God as an atonement for the sin which Saul had committed. How much more then will God accept in our behalf the blood of *his own* Son, who was sent into the world for the express purpose that he might expiate our guilt, and procure for us reconciliation with our offended God! Think of this, all ye who are accused by Satan and your own consciences, and who are trembling for fear of the Divine judgments; and know that his blood once shed on Calvary is now as available for you, as much as it was the very instant it was shed: it is a fountain, which, if you bathe in it, will effectually cleanse you from all sin — — —]

3. The importance of searching our own hearts—

[The crime of Saul was probably thought a meritorious act both by himself and those whom he employed as his agents in the persecution; for we are told, he sought to extirpate the Gibeonites "from a zeal for the children of Israel and Judah." But God did not judge as he judged; nor will he form his estimate of *our* conduct from our opinion of it: self-love is apt to blind us, and to make us think well of many things which God abhors. But he will judge our actions according to their quality in his sight. Let us then "search and try our ways, and turn unto the Lord:" and, forasmuch as we are blinded through the influence of our own corruptions, let us beg of him to "search and try our hearts, and to lead us in the way everlasting."]

## CCXVIII.

### THE COVENANT OF GRACE.

2 Sam. xxiii. 5. *Although my house be not so with God, yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure: for this is all my salvation, and all my desire.*

IN all the trials and troubles of life, religion alone can afford us any effectual support. To this the saints in all ages have fled for refuge, and in this they have found all the consolation they could desire. The latter days of David were a continual scene of domestic sorrows. The defilement of Tamar by her brother Amnon, the murder of Amnon by his brother Absalom, the rebellion and untimely death of Absalom, and the conspiracy and consequent destruction of Adonijah, all embittered his life: and God had foretold, that such afflictions should await him, as a punishment for the horrible sins he had committed in the matter of Uriah. David however was not without his consolations. Though he could not have the happiness of seeing his house walking in the ways of God, yet he had good reason to believe that God had accepted him; and in the view of the covenant which God had made with him, he could not but rejoice. We do not apprehend that this covenant related merely to the succession of his posterity upon the throne of Israel, or even to the advent of the Messiah from his loins: it can be no other than that covenant which God made with his own Son, and with us in him; for no other covenant corresponds with the description here given of it, nor could David speak of any other as all his salvation and all his desire. That covenant relates to the salvation of a ruined world by the blood and righteousness of the Lord Jesus.

The representation which David here gives us of it will lead us to shew,

I. The excellence of this covenant—

This is set forth in a striking view in the words before us. We notice,

1. Its

1. Its duration—

[Long before man had fallen, God, who foresaw his fall, devised a plan for his recovery: and in this plan his co-equal, co-eternal Son concurred: "The council of peace was between them both," says the Prophet[a]. To this St. Paul alludes, when he says, that he was "in hope of eternal life, which God had promised before the world began[b]." To whom could that promise be made, but unto the Lord Jesus Christ, as the Representative of his Church and people? Some Divines have called this the covenant of *Redemption*, as contra-distinguished to the covenant of *Grace;* the one being made with Christ only, and the other with man. But this appears not founded in Scripture. There is one covenant only; and that was made with Christ *personally*, and *fœderally:* as made with him *personally*, it promised him a seed, if he would lay down his life for them[c]; and as made with him *fœderally*, it promised salvation to all who should believe in him, and become members of his mystical body[d].

Now this covenant is "everlasting;" it has existed from the beginning, and shall exist to all eternity. No human being ever has been saved but by virtue of it; nor shall any child of man ever be admitted into heaven, but agreeably to its provisions. We say not that no person ever has been, or shall be, saved without *a distinct acquaintance* with it: for we believe that many heathens who never heard of it, and millions of children who have been incapable of understanding any thing about it, have been saved; but not a single soul has ever been accepted of God the Father, but as redeemed by the blood of his only-begotten Son. And perhaps we may say, that this circumstance gives to the glorified saints an advantage over angels themselves: for angels, though confirmed, we trust, in their happiness by the power of God, do not hold that happiness by so sure a tenure as the saints hold theirs: *they* cannot boast of holding it by the promise and oath of Jehovah; they cannot shew a covenant securing to them the everlasting possession of their inheritance, and that covenant confirmed and ratified with the blood of God's only dear Son: but *we* can refer to such a covenant, as the sure ground of all our expectations, and as the pledge that nothing shall ever separate us from the enjoyment of our God[e].]

2. Its fulness—

[It may truly be said to be "ordered in all things." There is not any thing that can conduce to our happiness either in this world or the next, that is not comprehended in it. Every thing is prepared for us both in a way of providence and of grace. All our comforts, and all our trials, are therein adjusted for our good.

[a] Zech. vi. 13. [b] Tit. i. 2. [c] Isai. liii. 10, 11.
[d] Gal. iii. 16, 17. [e] 2 Cor. i. 20.

good. All earthly things are secured to us, as far as they are necessary[f]; and even afflictions themselves are promised, as the appointed means of fitting us for the realms of bliss[g]. Whatever grace we stand in need of, it shall be given at such times, and in such a measure, as shall most display the glory of God. It is true that God *requires of us* many things, as repentance, faith, and holiness; but it is equally true that he *promises* all these things *to us:* he has "exalted his own Son to *give* us repentance[h];" he also *gives us* to believe in Christ[i]; and he promises that he will, by the influence of his Spirit, *cause us* to walk in his statutes, and to keep his judgments and do them[k]. We cannot place ourselves in any situation wherein God has not given us promises, "exceeding great and precious promises, suited to our necessities, and commensurate with our wants: nor is so small a thing as the falling of a hair of our head left to chance; it is all ordered by unerring wisdom: and though there may be some events which, separately and distinctly considered, may be regarded as evil, yet, collectively taken in all their bearings, they shall "all work together for our eternal good[l]."]

3. Its certainty—

[It is "sure" to every one who trusts in it. In this it differs widely from the covenant of works which was made with man in innocence: for *that* depending on the fidelity of the creature, was violated, and annulled: whereas *this*, depending altogether on the fidelity of God, who undertakes to *work in* us all that he *requires of* us, and who engages not only not to depart from us, but not to suffer us to depart from him[m], shall never fail in any one particular: "The mountains may depart and the hills be removed, but the covenant of my peace shall not be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on us[n]." True it is that, as under the Jewish dispensation many were not stedfast in *that* covenant, which was a *mixed*, and *national* covenant, so many who profess religion do really "make shipwreck of the faith[o]:" but they have never truly embraced the covenant of which we are speaking: they have embraced it only in a partial way, looking for its blessings without duly considering its obligations: they have been more intent on salvation from punishment, than salvation from sin. "Had they been really of us," says the Apostle, "they would no doubt have continued with us[p]." "The foundation of God standeth sure: the Lord knoweth them that are his. *But* let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity[q]." This being our indispensable duty,

[f] Matt. vi. 33. [g] Jer. xxx. 11. [h] Acts v. 31.
[i] Phil. i. 29. [k] Ezek. xxxvi. 25—27.
[l] Rom. viii. 28. [m] Jer. xxxii. 40. [n] Isai. liv. 9, 10.
[o] 1 Tim. i. 19. [p] 1 John ii. 19.
[q] 2 Tim. ii. 19. Καὶ should here be translated *but*. Compare 1 Cor. xii. 5. & xvi. 12. & 2 Tim. iii. 11. in the Greek.

duty, God promises and engages, "that sin shall not have dominion over us, because we are not under the law, but under grace[r]:" and we know that "He is faithful who hath called us, who also will do it[s]:" and this very circumstance of its being an article in God's covenant, a blessing to be gratuitously conferred by him, and freely received by us, this, I say, it is, which makes "the promise *sure* to all the seed[t]."]

When once we view this covenant aright, we shall see immediately,

II. The regard which it deserves—

We should not regard it merely as an object of curious research, or even of grateful admiration; but should make it,

1. The ground of all our hopes—

[Every other method of acceptance should be renounced; and this should be deliberately and cordially embraced[u]——— We should contemplate every offer of mercy, every communication of grace, every mean of salvation as originating in the eternal counsels of Heaven: every thing should be traced up to the love of God the Father, and to the plans arranged by the sacred Three, for the magnifying of the divine perfections in the salvation of man———Even the atonement itself must be considered as deriving all its efficacy from this covenant: for, if God the Father had not consented to accept his Son as a surety for us, and to regard his death as an atonement for our sin, however honourable to Christ his mediation for us might be, it would not have been available for our salvation. We should get such a distinct view of this covenant as David had; of its duration, (from everlasting to everlasting;) its fulness, its certainty; and then should say of it as he did, "THIS is all my salvation;" except in *this*, I have no more hope than the fallen angels: but through the provision which *this* has made for me, I scarcely envy the angels who never fell: for "I know in whom I have believed, that He is able to keep that which I have committed to him[x]:" and "I am confident that he who hath begun a good work in me will perform it until the day of Christ[y]."]

2. The source of all our joys—

[Whatever comforts we may possess in this world, we should derive our chief happiness from *this*: *this* should be "all our desire," or, as the word imports, all our *delight*———To this also

[r] Rom. vi. 14.
[s] 1 Thess. v. 23, 24. Mark the connexion of these two verses.
[t] Rom. iv. 16.
[u] 2 Tim. i. 9. The two members of this sentence may be greatly enlarged. [x] 2 Tim. iv. 8. [y] 2 Tim. i. 12.

also we should have recourse in every season of affliction. David betook himself to it under all his domestic troubles, and in the near prospect of eternity. "His house, alas! was not so with God," as he could wish. And how many are there who have great trials in their families! some from their unkindness, and others from their removal by death[z]———Let every one that is so circumstanced learn from David where to flee for comfort: let him contemplate the riches of divine grace as exhibited in this covenant, and the blessedness of having an interest in it, and he will soon forget his sorrows, and have a heart overflowing with the most exalted joy——— If, in addition to other troubles, we are lying upon the bed of death, we may well, like David, seek comfort in this covenant, and make "the last words of David[a]" our last words also. What can so effectually remove the sting of death, as to behold a covenant-God in Christ Jesus, engaged to "keep him unto the end," and to receive him to an everlasting enjoyment of his presence and glory?———Study then the wonders of this covenant, that they may be familiar to your minds in a time of health; and so shall they fill you with unutterable peace and joy, when every other refuge shall fail, and your soul be summoned into the presence of its God.]

[z] This may be amplified so as to apply to many cases which may greatly interest the feelings of an audience.

[a] ver. 1.

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## CCXIX.

### DAVID'S DESIRE FOR THE WATER OF THE WELL OF BETHLEHEM.

2 Sam. xxiii. 15—17. *And David longed, and said, Oh that one would give me drink of the water of the well of Bethlehem, which is by the gate! And the three mighty men brake through the host of the Philistines, and drew water out of the well of Beth-lehem that was by the gate; and took it, and brought it to David: nevertheless he would not drink thereof, but poured it out unto the Lord: and he said, Be it far from me, O Lord, that I should do this: is not this the blood of the men that went in jeopardy of their lives? therefore he would not drink it.*

THE best of men are liable to err: but in this they differ widely from the ungodly, that they are glad, as soon as they find out their error, to have it rectified. David inconsiderately expressed a wish for some water out of the well of Bethlehem; but when he saw what his inconsiderateness had occasioned,

sioned, and especially what *might* have arisen from it, he was grieved at himself for what he had done, and rejected with abhorrence the gratification which he had before desired.

This anecdote respecting him may appear unworthy of a distinct consideration: but it is in reality very instructive. Let us consider,

I. This wish of David's—

To view it aright, we must notice it,

1. As foolishly indulged—

[That water was not necessary to him; for his army was not at all reduced to straits for want of water: and by the circumstance of its being in the possession of his enemies, it was unattainable, unless his enemies should be first subdued. To wish for it therefore merely to gratify his appetite, was foolish; and to express that wish to others was wrong. But in him we see a picture of human nature in general: all are wishing for something which they do not possess, though it be neither necessary to their welfare, nor easy to be attained. "Ye desire and have not," is the account given of men by the voice of inspiration[a]; and it characterizes all from early childhood, till age or infirmity has cured the disease ——— This tendency of our minds is decidedly wrong, inasmuch as it argues discontent with the lot assigned us by Providence, and too high an estimation of the things of time and sense[b]. God, and heavenly things, may be desired with the utmost intenseness of our souls[c]: but earthly things, whatever they may be, are no further to be desired than as God may be enjoyed in them, or glorified by them[d]: and, as David in this wish had respect to nothing but mere personal gratification, he so far acted in a way unworthy of his high character.]

2. As rashly countenanced—

[Three of his most distinguished warriors determined, if possible, to gratify his desire; and, of their own accord, without any order from him, cut their way through the Philistine army, drew the water, and brought it to him. This was rash and presumptuous in the extreme. Had they been moved to it by God, as David was to go against Goliath with a sling and a stone, or as Jonathan was to climb up a rock, and, unsupported by any one but his armour-bearer, to attack a Philistine garrison, they would have acted right; because in executing the Divine will they might expect the Divine protection: but to go on such an errand without

[a] Jam. iv. 2. See the Greek.
[b] Numb. xi. 4, 5.
[c] Ps. xlii. 1, 2. & lxiii. 1.
[d] Ps. lxxiii. 25.

without any command either from God or man, was to expose themselves unnecessarily to the utmost peril, and in reality to tempt God. Doubtless a contempt of danger is a great virtue in a soldier; but it may be unduly exercised: and we are persuaded that, before men put their lives in jeopardy, they should inquire, whether the occasion be sufficiently important to demand it, or, at least, whether they be called to it in the way of duty.]

3. As piously suppressed—

[When the water was brought to him, he refused to drink of it; and, with a mixture of shame and gratitude, poured it out as a drink-offering unto the Lord. To him it appeared, that the drinking of it would be like drinking the blood of his most faithful servants: and therefore, much as he had desired it before, he would on no account gratify his appetite at such an expense. This argued true love to those who had served him at so great a risk, and genuine piety towards God, whose merciful kindness he thus gratefully acknowledged. But how little of such self-denial is there in the world! how few, when a desired gratification is within their reach, will abstain from the indulgence of it, from the consideration of the evils which may accrue to the object that administers to their delight! ——— If however we condemn David for cherishing such a wish, we cannot but applaud the forbearance he exercised in reference to it, when it was obtained.]

Let us now contemplate,

II. The lessons to be learned from it—

1. How strong a principle is love!

[Love dictated the measure which these soldiers took: whilst therefore we disapprove the act, we must admire the principle from which it proceeded. It is a principle "strong as death;" nor can "many waters quench it." It is a principle also by which, not soldiers only, but persons in every situation and relation of life should be actuated: and how happy would it be for the world, if it operated universally in its full extent! How happy if, in our social and domestic circles, the only contest was, who should shew most love, and exert himself in the most self-denying way for the good of others! This is the spirit which God himself approves[e]; and the Lord grant it may increase and abound amongst us more and more[f]!]

2. How should we delight to exercise love towards our Lord Jesus Christ in particular!

[He is "the Captain of our salvation," and "of all the hosts of Israel:" and he has opened to us access to the waters of life, "of which whosoever drinketh shall never thirst[g]." Moreover, to effect this, he has not merely jeoparded his life, but

[e] Heb. x. 24. [f] 1 Thess. iii. 12. [g] John iv. 10, 13, 14.

but actually laid down his life: knowing assuredly all the sufferings he must endure in order to procure these blessings for us, he voluntarily undertook our cause, and never drew back, till he could say, "It is finished." Is He not then worthy to be loved by *us?* Yea, should there be any bounds to our love to him? Should we not be "willing to be bound, or even to die, for his sake?" Surely, whatever dangers we may be encompassed with, we should say, "None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto me," so that I may but fulfil his will, and promote his glory.]

3. With what grief and indignation should we mortify every sinful desire!

[When once we see what sin has done, we shall see what it merits at our hands. It was to counteract the effects of sin, that Jesus shed his blood. Shall we then indulge sin of any kind? However gratifying it may be to our feelings, should we not say, like David in our text, "Is not this the blood of God's only dear Son, even of my best Friend, who laid down his life for me? I will not drink it; I will sacrifice my every lust unto the Lord." Ah, Brethren! look at sin in this view: and if it be dear to you as a right eye, or apparently as necessary as a right hand, do not hesitate one moment to cast it from you with abhorrence; humbling yourselves for having ever conceived a desire after it, and adoring your God that it has not long since involved you in everlasting death and misery.]

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## CCXX.

### DAVID NUMBERING THE PEOPLE.

2 Sam. xxiv. 11—15. *When David was up in the morning, the word of the Lord came unto the prophet Gad, David's seer, saying, Go and say unto David, Thus saith the Lord, I offer thee three things; choose thee one of them, that I may do it unto thee. So Gad came to David, and told him, and said unto him, Shall seven years of famine come unto thee in thy land? or wilt thou flee three months before thine enemies, while they pursue thee? or that there be three days' pestilence in thy land? Now advise, and see what answer I shall return to him that sent me. And David said unto Gad, I am in a great strait: let us fall now into the hand of the Lord, (for his mercies are great,) and let me not fall into the hand of man. So the Lord sent a pestilence upon Israel, from the morning even to the time appointed: and there died of the people, from Dan even to Beersheba, seventy thousand men.*

SINS,

SINS, punishments, humiliations, forgivenesses, succeed each other in a melancholy train throughout the Bible, even as clouds after rain in the material world. Even the most pious characters have their faults and blemishes, which call forth the Divine chastisements on themselves and others. We have here an account of David numbering the people, and bringing a heavy judgment on the whole land. The history will lead us to notice,

I. The severity of God in punishing sin—

The sin which David committed was exceeding great—

[It had been enjoined by God, that the people never should be numbered without a half shekel being collected from every one of them as a tribute to the Lord, or, as it is called, "a ransom for his soul," "*that there might be no plague amongst them when they were numbered*[a]." Now as David never once mentioned this in the order that was given, and as this collection was not made in all the time that the census was taking, it seems that David greatly transgressed in this particular, and *that the plague was sent among them on this account*. But it is manifest that David was actuated by *pride*, in wishing to know the extent of the population he governed; and that he was indulging *confidence in an arm of flesh*, instead of trusting in God only. That he was faulty in these particulars was visible even to so wicked a man as Joab, who expostulated with him on the subject, and warned him that he was bringing guilt and punishment upon the whole nation[b]. Now of all sins, these are the most hateful in the sight of God[c]: and to persist in them so long, in opposition to such plain warnings as were delivered to him, was a very grievous offence.]

The punishment inflicted for it was proportionably severe—

[God sent a Prophet to him, to offer him a choice of three judgments, of seven[d] years of famine, or three months of unsuccessful warfare, or three days of pestilence: a painful choice indeed! but David wisely preferred the falling into the hands of God, and not into the hands of man. The election being made, the judgment was immediately executed: and no less than seventy thousand men were slain by a destroying angel, before the expiration

[a] Exod. xxx. 12—14. [b] 1 Chron. xxi. 3. [c] Jer. xvii. 5, 6.

[d] "*Seven* years of famine" should probably be read "*three*," that being the number annexed to the other judgments, and it being expressly so represented in the parallel account. See 1 Chron. xxi. 12.

tion of the appointed time[e]. What now shall we think of *sin?* Is it so light a matter as the generality of men imagine? and are not they justly called "fools" who "make a mock at it?" The sins of the heart are considered as altogether venial: pride and self-confidence are scarcely numbered in the catalogue of sins: but behold in what light they are viewed by an holy God! O that we might learn, if not from God's declarations, at least from his judgments, what an awful thing sin is, and with what tremendous punishment it will be visited!]

Next let us view,

II. The goodness of God in pardoning sin—

David and the elders of Israel humbled themselves before God—

[David had expressed, and that too in very energetic language, his shame and sorrow on account of his transgression: but God determined to punish his iniquity. On the execution of vengeance upon the land, the elders of Israel united with him in the deepest humiliation[f]: and David, when he saw the angel standing over Jerusalem with a drawn sword in his hand, pleaded most earnestly with God, that the punishment might fall on him who had been the author of the sin, and not on the people who were innocent[g]. This was a mark of true contrition. When the soul is not really abased before God, it will rather extenuate its guilt, or cast the blame upon others[h]; but when it has a just sense of its guilt, it will be willing to take shame to itself to the utmost extent of its deserts: and such a spirit will never be exercised in vain.]

Now therefore God removed the punishment, and pardoned the iniquity—

[Instantly did God command the angel to "stay his hand:" but at the same time a command was given to build an altar there, and to offer sacrifices to the offended Majesty of heaven. God from the beginning had honoured his own institutions, and had taken all fit occasions of directing penitents to that great Sacrifice whereby alone the sins of men could be forgiven: and now he stopped the angel on the very spot where he had, many centuries before, arrested Abraham's hand when sacrificing his son; and where, but a short time after, the Temple itself was built; that Temple in which all the sacrifices were offered, and in

[e] Some have taken occasion from this expression, which they say may signify the Evening, to represent the pestilence as lasting only to the evening sacrifice of the same day, that is, only nine hours in all: but there is strong internal evidence in the history that it continued the whole three days.

[f] 1 Chron. xxi. 16. [g] ib. ver. 17. [h] 1 Sam. xv, 20, 21.

in the services of which the death of Christ was so abundantly prefigured[i]. Nay, on this occasion God was pleased to put peculiar honour on the sacrifice, in that he sent fire from heaven to consume it[k]. Thus did he point out to David and to all Israel, thus also has he shewn to the whole world, that though penitence and prayer are indispensable requisites in those that shall be pardoned, it is the sacrifice of Christ only that avails for our acceptance with God———]

The history very particularly leads us to notice, in the next place—

III. The effect which the sins of individuals produce on the community—

It was in reality for *Israel*'s sin that this punishment was inflicted—

[" The anger of God, we are told, was kindled against *Israel*:" and on this account " he moved David against them, to say, Go, number Israel and Judah[l]." In the parallel place we are told, that " Satan stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number Israel[m]." We are not to suppose that God himself actually tempted David; for we are expressly told, that " he doth not tempt any man[n]:" but he permitted Satan to tempt him; and we well know, that if God's restraining hand be removed, Satan will prevail against the strongest of men, and " sift them as wheat." But when David had thus voluntarily sinned, both he and his people were punished for their iniquity. In a word, for *Israel*'s sin *he* was left, and for *his* sin *they* were *punished*. In this dispensation there was nothing unworthy of the Divine character; for both David and Israel justly deserved punishment, and might have been visited with God's judgments independently of this sin: but by this dispensation God would shew us, that, *in this world*, communities should be dealt with as one body; the head being afflicted for the members, and the members for the head: that so all may be led to the utmost of their power to consult the welfare of the whole.]

Let us therefore be on our guard, lest we be instrumental to the destruction, rather than to the welfare, of each other—

[What evil may not a head of a family bring on the members; a Ruler on his subjects; a Minister on his people! or what may not *they* suffer through the misconduct of those over whom they are placed! Let this connexion be duly considered: and, whatever station *we* are called to fill, let us determine, through

[i] 2 Chron. iii. 1. [k] 1 Chron. xxi. 26.
[l] ver. 1. [m] 1 Chron. xxi. 1. [n] Jam. i. 13.

through grace, that we will perform the duties of it, every joint supplying its utmost aid for the edification of the whole body.* And let us be more ready to take blame to ourselves, than to cast it on others. More particularly, let us watch and pray, that we enter not into temptation; and that Satan may not be permitted to get advantage against us. Thus shall we be blessings to the Community, and to the Church of God; and shall through the great Sacrifice be accepted of God in the eternal world.]

* Eph. 4. 16.

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